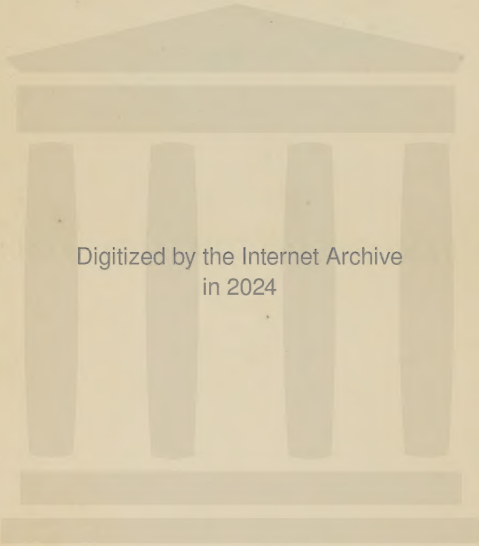


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THE PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS.



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THE
PARABLES
OF
THE LORD JESUS

SKETCHES AND SKELETONS
OF
SERMONS

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"FOOTSTEPS OF JESUS" "LOOKING UNTO JESUS" "EXPOSITORY OUTLINES
ON THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS" ETC.

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PREFACE.

WHILE it cannot be said that the parables of our Lord have been entirely overlooked, yet the works which have hitherto appeared on the subject are by no means numerous. Had, however, their number been much greater, that would not have rendered any fresh attempt to expound and enforce those inimitable productions unnecessary. The present writer only regrets that he has not been able to do more ample justice to them; but he can truly say that he has done his best, and hopes that his feeble efforts may prove, in some degree, acceptable and useful. He is encouraged to entertain such an expectation by the gratifying reception which his previous labours of a similar nature have received, and he trusts that those who have expressed their approval of his former Outlines, will find these not altogether unworthy of their favour.

The whole of the parables are embraced in this volume, and in this respect it is more complete than any other work with which the author is acquainted. But while all the discourses in which the parabolic element is contained are here embraced, of the shorter ones only brief sketches have been given, while the rest have been opened and applied at greater length.

The writer has endeavoured to be on his guard against what may be called undue spiritualizing. In

treating this class of subjects there are two extremes to be avoided, namely, a meagre generality and a fanciful minuteness. Some have erred exceedingly in the latter direction, by allowing a prolific imagination to lead them astray. As in the types of the Old Testament, so in the parables of the New, there is ample room, and it may be strong temptation, for such to exercise their ingenuity. But great caution is needful, for the practice, besides being unwise and unwarranted, is attended with considerable danger, even that of tampering with inspired truth, and making, as did the ancient scribes, the word of God of none effect. "Grant, Lord," was the prayer of old Thomas Fuller, "that I may never rack a scripture simile beyond the true intent thereof; lest, instead of sucking milk, I squeeze blood out of it."

It may be stated, in conclusion, that it is intended with as little delay as possible, to prepare a similar volume on the Saviour's miracles. The harmony between his words and works is so perfect, that the one series will form an appropriate continuation of the other. And may HE whose special function is to take of the things of Christ, and show them in their matchless worth, and apply them in their saving efficacy, graciously own and honour these imperfect expositions, by rendering them conducive to spiritual profit, and the promotion of the divine glory and praise.

PARABLES OF THE LORD JESUS

THE SOWER.

THE SAME DAY WENT JESUS OUT OF THE HOUSE, AND SAT BY THE SEA SIDE. AND GREAT MULTITUDES WERE GATHERED TOGETHER UNTO HIM, SO THAT HE WENT INTO A SHIP, AND SAT; AND THE WHOLE MULTITUDE STOOD ON THE SHORE. AND HE SPAKE MANY THINGS UNTO THEM IN PARABLES, SAYING, BEHOLD, A SOWER WENT FORTH TO SOW, &c.—Mat. xiii. 1-9.

OUR blessed Lord, as all must acknowledge, was the prince of preachers. Words of stricter truth or greater propriety could not be uttered than those in which it was said, “Never man spake like this man.” In every thing that appertained to him—his personal character, the wonderful works which he wrought, the obedience he rendered, the sufferings he endured, the death that he died, he stands alone; and while his pre-eminence in these respects is undoubted, it is no less so when we regard him as the Teacher come from God. His wisdom, his pathos, his faithfulness, his energy, all were unrivalled, and the palm of unquestioned superiority belongs to him alone.

While labouring in this capacity he addressed himself, not to the cultivated few, but to the general masses. And so strikingly adapted were his discourses to their condition, that “the common people heard him gladly.” This adaptation consisted in a variety of features, but especially in the illustrative method of instruction which he adopted. In no abstract theories, no subtle disqui-

sitions, no chain of long and elaborate argumentation did he ever indulge ; on the contrary, he presented the most momentous truths in a form the most popular and familiar, clothing them in comparisons taken from the occurrences of daily life, and thus bringing them down on a level with the meanest comprehension. Upon a plain and simple-minded people, even illustrations borrowed from the sciences are in a great measure thrown away ; but let a truth be set forth under some similitude connected with the operations of husbandry, or any of the ordinary processes of nature, and the most illiterate will be likely to understand its nature, and to feel its force.

Such is the character of all the beautiful parables of Christ, and it is particularly the case with the one we have now to consider. It was, it seems, the first he delivered, and on that account it has a special claim upon our attention ; just as his first miracle, that of turning water into wine, is invested with peculiar interest for the same reason. But in addition to its being the beginning of his parables, it is in itself as striking and important as any which were spoken by him during the whole course of his subsequent ministry.

Let us then contemplate the scene which is here presented, and the results which are here described. In this two-fold division it will be found that the leading particulars of this instructive parable are embraced.

I. THE SCENE WHICH IS HERE PRESENTED.—“ The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship and sat ; and the whole multitude stood on the shore.” It was altogether indifferent to the Saviour where he taught. He was ready to preach whenever sinners were ready to hear. This he did frequently in the synagogue and in the temple, but his ministrations were not confined to those places. Sometimes he addressed the people on the

summit of a mountain, sometimes in the loneliness of the desert, and sometimes, as in the instance before us, from the bosom of the deep. He did not think it any reason why he should be silent because the ground was not consecrated, or because the hour was not canonical. He knew that it was not the place that sanctified the service, but that, on the contrary, the service sanctified the place.

It was a truly pleasing scene which was exhibited on this occasion. How simple, and yet how sublime! The great Teacher is seated in a vessel on the side of the lake. Above him is the extended canopy of heaven. Before him, on the margin of the sea, are the people crowded together, covering the beach like pebbles. All is calm and serene, nothing being heard but the preacher's voice, which is listened to with attention by the vast multitude. To have seen the Son of God addressing them under such circumstances; proclaiming from another element the great truths of another world: it was indeed a sight over which angels might love to linger!

"And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow." It is very probable that these words had reference to, and that they were suggested by, what occurred at the time they were spoken. Frequently had the same thing been seen before, for the Jews were an agricultural people; but to their eyes the sight was without any signification beyond the ordinary one of preparing food for the sustenance of their bodies. Jesus, however, seizes this common occurrence, and makes it the material type and image of a sublime and glorious lesson. But we have to notice more particularly—

1. *The Sower.* "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." This may be specially applied to the Saviour himself; but, at the same time, the words are applicable to all who are engaged in the work of the ministry,

and also, in a lower sense, to those who labour in a less public sphere. When the sabbath-school teacher is on his way to meet his class; when the tract distributor is directing his course towards his appointed district; when the Christian visiter is marching along through crowded courts and alleys to the abodes of sickness and poverty; in each instance it can be said, "Behold, a sower goeth forth to sow." But when the steps of a faithful minister ascend the pulpit, the words can be uttered with peculiar propriety.

In specifying some of the points of resemblance involved in this comparison, it may be observed—

(1.) That sowing requires a considerable amount of skill. To the careless observer it may seem a very easy task, and for which he might think himself fully qualified; but, were it not so important an affair, it might be said to him—Just try for a few hours, and then it will be seen whether you are competent for the work or not. Any person, it is true, even a child, could scatter the seed over the ground, but to do so in a proper manner requires careful training and much experience. So with the work of the minister. Some of his hearers may suppose that they could stand up in his place, and speak equally well, if not a great deal better. Now were it not for the disgrace that might be brought upon the sacred services of the sanctuary, perhaps the best method to be adopted in regard to such would be, as in the above case, to let them try. Moses once said, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets;" so would we say, especially concerning those who are disposed to think that in preaching there is no difficulty whatever. Our wish is that they had to sustain the ministerial office, just for a few sabbaths; and it is probable that the result would be a considerable modification both of their views and feelings.

It is not, however, in the mere fluency of language, not even in a general announcement of the truths of the

gospel, that the difficulty lies ; but in presenting those truths as they ought to be presented. To scatter the seed at random is, as we have seen, one thing ; to scatter it in the way in which it is done by the experienced husbandman, is another thing. Now to be skilful in the word of righteousness is absolutely necessary in order rightly to divide that word, and give to every one his portion of meat in due season. Not only is a different mode of address, but a different class of truths requisite to rouse the careless, and bring down the pride of a self-justifying spirit, from what is necessary to comfort the humble and contrite in heart ; nor is it easy to say which should be most carefully guarded against, the infusion of a false peace, or inflaming the wounds which ought to be healed. An indiscriminate application, either of the promises or threatenings, is not merely ill-judged, but cannot fail to be exceedingly pernicious. Minds of an obdurate character, which have been rendered callous by long habits of vice, must be appalled and subdued by the terrors of the Lord ; while others should be drawn with the cords of love, and with the bands of a man. Some we must save with fear, plucking them out of the fire ; on others we must have compassion, making a difference. And for this, what wisdom, what holy skill, what careful discrimination, are required !

(2.) Sowing is a work attended with much anxiety. The grain which is cast into the ground has many enemies. The worms are there to consume it, and the birds of the air are hovering about to devour it. It is supposed that of all the seed which is sown no less than two-fifths, or nearly one-half, is lost, under ordinary circumstances, in this manner. And then when the green blade, so tenderly susceptible of danger, rises above the clods, the piercing blasts may nip it, the burning rays of the sun may scorch it, or the long continued drought may wither it. Yet upon that which is

thus exposed to so many dangers, how much depends ! What it produces is the chief support of man, as well as many of the inferior animals. As regards the husbandman the consequences of failure would be most serious. There are various claims upon him, and it is only as the sowing turns out to be successful, and issues in an abundant crop, that he will be able to meet his liabilities, and provide things honestly for himself and family. To him most assuredly it is not a trivial matter ; in no unimportant sense it is his life. That he should therefore feel considerable anxiety is what might be expected, seeing that the interests which are at stake are so momentous.

Now the spiritual sower is no stranger to such a feeling. Upon the results of his labours, it is true, his own recompense does not depend. "For we are unto God," says the apostle, "a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish." If he should have to labour in vain, and spend his strength for nought, he is yet able to say, "Surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." Still his heart's desire is that his hearers might be saved, and that the solemn message he is charged to deliver, may prove to them the savour of life unto life, and not the savour of death unto death. But knowing that the latter may be the case ; knowing that many powerful influences are at work whose tendency is to lead to such a dire calamity ; knowing that the fairest prospects may be blasted, and that after every effort put forth, no fruits of righteousness to the divine praise and glory may appear ; knowing all this, it is no wonder that he should feel at times the most trembling solicitude. He has precious seed to sow, but as he goeth forth with it, it is often *weeping*.

(3.) Notwithstanding this, sowing is an operation that is undertaken in the exercise of faith and hope. If there is much to cause anxiety, there is more to

inspire confidence. Not in a spirit of gloomy despondency does the farmer toilfully traverse the rough furrows, and cast the valuable grain to rot in the earth. He has a firm expectation of receiving a bounteous return for all his labour. He believes in the uniformity of those great laws by which the natural world is governed; and especially does he rely upon the truth of the ancient promise—a promise which has never been falsified yet—“While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.” Under the influence of this belief, as he commits the seed into the ground, he sees, by anticipation, the green blade shooting forth; he sees the tender plant transformed into a tall and vigorous stalk; he sees the cars filling, and the corn ripening; he sees the golden sheaves, and his heart is gladdened with the shouts of the happy, though as yet far distant, harvest-home.

And what saith the scriptures? “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” This is indeed strong consolation; and while it should be a preservative from despondency, it ought also to be an incentive to renewed and unwearied exertions. “In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.” Let the Christian labourer then be encouraged. Let him go forth and sow, sow hopefully, and that beside all waters. Though he may have various obstacles to contend with, and sore disappointments to bear, which may wring his heart with anguish,

and fill his eyes with tears, still his labours shall not be in vain in the Lord. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

(4.) But though the sower expects, and has ample grounds to expect, a recompense for his toil, yet he has to wait a considerable period before the fruit appears. Between the time of sowing and the time of reaping, many anxious months must intervene. First, the dreary months of winter, that its frost may mellow the seed; then the milder months of spring, that its genial showers may swell it; and subsequently the sunny months of summer, that its glowing heat may mature it. "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." Now this holds good as regards spiritual husbandry. If the farmer does not expect the crop when the grain is scarcely sown, it would ill become us to feel disheartened if the effects of our labours are not at once apparent. God, who is himself never in a hurry, is pleased to try the faith of his servants, and often causes circumstances of the greatest discouragement to issue in, and to be counterbalanced by, the most delightful surprise. In proof of this instances almost innumerable might be adduced; but we select one of a very striking character from the history of modern missions. For sixteen long years a band of devoted men laboured with untiring zeal as Christian evangelists in Tahiti, one of the South Sea Islands; but not a single conversion took place, and nothing appeared to indicate that the least interest was awakened, or any spirit of religious inquiry produced. The vilest abominations were committed, devastating wars frequently occurred, and the prevailing system of idolatry, with all its cruel and bloody rites, continued in full vigour. In a moral and spiritual aspect, the heavens above seemed to be like brass, and the earth as

iron. But at length the set time came, a time of light after a long night of darkness, a time of refreshing after a dreary season of barrenness and desolation. God was pleased to commence a mighty work, and that in such a manner as secured all the glory to himself. This is worthy of special notice, for the missionaries at the time were driven away from the island, and cut off from all communication with the people. Two of the natives, it appears, who had been formerly employed in the families of the missionaries, had received, unknown to them, some favourable impressions; the consequence was, that they united together, not to offer sacrifices to their hideous idols, as heretofore, but to call upon the name of the Lord. To these a considerable number of persons attached themselves; and thus when the long-tried servants of Christ returned, they found, to their great joy and surprise, a large multitude of praying men and women. So conspicuous, so evidently genuine was the transformation effected, that it is said they had little else to do but help forward the work which God had so signally and unexpectedly begun.

Most important is it, therefore, for us to guard against a spirit of impatience. What we have to do is to be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, however discouraging the prospects may be. Duties are ours; the bestowal of that effectual blessing which can alone render human efforts successful, belongs to Him whose ways are often mysterious, but who is wont, in the end, to transcend all the expectations of his people.

“Let us then be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour, *and to wait*.”

We have thus pointed out some of the more prominent features which belong to the operation of sowing, as

illustrative of the work in which the servants of God are engaged, and the spirit by which they should be actuated. Leaving the sower, we now proceed to make a few remarks concerning—

2. *The Seed.* This comparison may be employed with special propriety to set forth the word of God. This will appear from the following particulars.

(1.) In seed there exists a principle of vitality. It is endowed with a certain inherent quality which causes it to germinate and grow. This principle is mysterious in its nature, but of unspeakable importance in its effects. The long period also during which it retains its vitality is very remarkable. Grains of corn, as is well known, have been discovered in some of the Egyptian mummies; but though they were buried for three or four thousand years, yet on being lodged in the earth, they have sprouted and brought forth fruit.

Now the word of God is a living word. It is the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever. Far from being a mere dead letter, there is in it a principle of immortal vitality and vigour. "The words that I speak unto you," said our Lord, "they are spirit, and they are life;" and what they were when they came forth from his gracious lips, that they are still; the same in freshness and force, in their quickening energy and divine efficiency.

(2.) What the seed produces is of the same nature as itself. God gives to every seed its own body; he has endowed each kind with special and distinctive qualities. The apostle asks, "Can the fig tree bear olive berries? either a vine, figs?" In like manner, wheat cannot bring forth barley, neither barley, wheat. Every seed generates its peculiar species, and no other. So with the inspired word; its effects, when it is savingly received, correspond with its own character. The life of the believer is thus a transcript of the truths contained in the sacred volume; it is the revealed will

of God embodied in a course of active obedience ; it is a fulfilment of the promise, " I will put my laws into their inward parts, and write them upon their hearts ; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." Now while the features by which the scriptures are distinguished are various, one of the most prominent is their holiness. " Thy word," says the Psalmist, " is very pure ;" so that it is quite evident that those who hold the truth in unrighteousness, have received it only in form, and not in reality.

(3.) Before the seed can germinate and grow, certain influences are indispensably necessary. There must be air, and heat, and moisture ; and each, especially the two latter, must be so regulated and combined, that there may not be too much or too little of either. But here, whether in supplying or adjusting these influences, the husbandman is altogether impotent. All he can do is to look to Him who has the elements under his control ; who gives rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. Now He who is the source of all natural, is also the source of all spiritual influences ; and without these, every effort put forth in connection with the Christian cause, however wisely conducted and diligently pursued, must prove abortive. What need is there, then, for us to present the prayer, a prayer which in its lower and higher signification, is equally appropriate—

" Be gracious, heaven, for now laborious man
Has done his part ; ye fostering breezes, blow ;
Ye softening dews, ye tender showers, descend."

In concluding these introductory observations, and reserving the consideration of the remainder of this important parable for another occasion, we have only one remark to make in reference, not to the sower and the seed, but to the soil. It is, that it must be previously prepared by ploughing, and various other methods.

And not more necessary is it that the soil should be prepared for the reception of the seed, than that our hearts be prepared for a believing reception of the gospel message. "Take heed how ye hear," was the Saviour's exhortation; and however we may hear, with whatever apparent reverence and attention, our hearing is likely to be in vain, unless our minds are brought into a suitable frame by previous meditation and prayer. Of Ezra it is said "that he had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it; and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." But what was needful in his case as an expounder of the divine testimony, and for all who now labour in word and doctrine, is equally needful for every hearer, inasmuch as without it his attendance upon the ordinances of the sanctuary will be, not for the better, but for the worse.

To the unconverted this applies with still greater force. What is the reason that so many listen to the word of salvation in vain? As will be seen in the following discourse, it is owing to several causes; but one very obvious reason is, that they have never felt their need of its blessings. Let a work of conviction be wrought in them by the ploughshare of God's law, and let their souls be softened and subdued, whether by some afflictive dispensation of divine providence or by any other means, then how different will it be with them! To all such it may be said, in the words of the prophet, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."

THE SOWER—(Continued.)

AND HE SPAKE MANY THINGS UNTO THEM IN PARABLES, SAYING, BEHOLD, A SOWER WENT FORTH TO SOW; AND WHEN HE SOWED, SOME SEEDS FELL BY THE WAY SIDE, AND THE FOWLS CAME AND DEVoured THEM UP: SOME FELL UPON STONY PLACES, WHERE THEY HAD NOT MUCH EARTH; AND FORTHWITH THEY SPRUNG UP, BECAUSE THEY HAD NO DEEPNESS OF EARTH: AND WHEN THE SUN WAS UP, THEY WERE SCORCHED; AND BECAUSE THEY HAD NO ROOT THEY WITHERED AWAY. AND SOME FELL AMONG THORNS, &c.—Mat. xiii. 3-9.

WE proposed in the former discourse to view this parable in two separate aspects. The first of these, namely, the scene which is here presented, has already engaged our meditations. It is set before us in the opening words, “Behold, a sower went forth to sow,” which suggested several thoughts both as regards the sower and the seed. Let us now proceed to notice—

II. THE RESULTS WHICH ARE HERE DESCRIBED.—With these the parable is mainly occupied; and what the Saviour states concerning the different kinds of ground, by way of representing various classes of hearers, demands our most serious attention. In reviewing these classes we have to commence with—

1. *The Inconsiderate.* “Behold, a sower went forth to sow; and when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up.” It is subsequently added, “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which receiveth seed by the way side.” Several things are here mentioned, and we shall see that they lead to, and operate successively upon, one another.

(1.) *Ignorance.* This class, a very numerous one it is to be feared, are said to hear the word, but understand it not. If they appeared in certain communions, like that of Rome, it would be no marvel. There scripture inquiries are discouraged, if not absolutely forbidden; ignorance is regarded as the mother of devotion; and those persons are commended for the spirit of implicit faith and profound reverence they evince, who deal with their understandings as certain Oriental worshippers do with their sandals—leave them at the doors of their temples, and never presume to take them within, lest places so sacred should be polluted and profaned. But the evil which is here denounced abounds to a degree that is almost incredible among those who are favoured with the most ample means of religious instruction. After having sat under the sound of the gospel for years, how dark, how confused are their views even of the first principles of the oracles of God!

(2.) *Inattention.* This seems to have been the most prominent feature in their character, and hence the general title we have given to them. Not understanding, evidently denotes in their case, not attending to the word so as to be able to understand it. Their minds were not given to it; its truths were not seriously pondered; the solemn realities it sets forth were not laid to heart. What the Psalmist says of idols can be applied to them, “Eyes have they, but they see not:” they are spiritually blind, although the heavenly light is shining so brightly around them. And how is it that their minds are so dark? The next item enumerated shows—“They have ears, but they hear not.” How can they hear when crowds of vain and vagrant thoughts are passing continually to and fro within them; when any thing and every thing occupies their attention, rather than the important matters which the servant of God is seeking to enforce and explain? They are in the sanctuary as to their bodily presence, but that is all

that can be said of them. While there is such a thing as being absent in body, but present in spirit, with them it is quite the reverse; they are present in body, but in spirit they are far away. Alas, how empty would our congregations frequently be if no more bodies were there than there are souls!

(3.) *Obduracy*. It is no uncommon thing to see a footpath in the midst of a corn field; and though it is generally ploughed up like the rest of the ground, yet it soon becomes hard again in consequence of being trodden by the footsteps that pass over it. At the time of sowing some grains would be likely to fall there, but sink into the soil they could not. So with the present class of hearers; there is, in addition to what has been previously mentioned, a hardness about them which is truly appalling. So frivolous and thoughtless are they that divine truth leaves them altogether unaffected. They can say with the Apostle, but in a sense sadly contrary to that in which he used the words,—“None of these things move me.” Threatenings the most solemn, invitations the most encouraging, promises the most precious, appeals the most tender and touching—they continue unmoved under them all.

These various features, as we have already stated, act and re-act upon each other. Inattention necessarily produces ignorance, and both lead to spiritual callousness and insensibility. In the epistle to the Ephesians there is a passage in which they are all combined, and their reciprocal influence exhibited. “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness (or hardness) of their heart.” Here there is reference, first, to the vanity of their mind; it was filled with all that was vain and trifling, as well as with what was more grossly vicious and

debasement. To the vanity of their mind is added the darkness of their understanding ; and then, both as the cause and consequence of the former, the impenetrable hardness of their heart.

But in the production of these results, our Lord shows that another agency is in active operation. It is that of the wicked one, who cometh and catcheth away that which was sown. He is ever on the alert, watching and striving with malignant industry to do his deadly work. Hence we read, " If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost ; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." This is his constant aim and object, and no means are omitted that infernal malice and ingenuity can suggest, to prevent the entrance of the word, and counteract its saving power. Nothing does he dread so much as a serious consideration by the children of men of its great verities, for he knows full well how fatal to his dominion over them it would be likely to prove : and therefore he endeavours in every possible way to divert their attention, lest peradventure they should believe and be saved. Much is there in ourselves that has this tendency—our indisposition to spiritual things, our groveling affections, our worldly-mindedness, our prejudices, our unbelief, our sloth, our levity ; but upon all these, as ready-prepared instruments, the busy hand of the great destroyer is laid, and thus an efficiency for evil is imparted to them over and above what they otherwise possess.

Now this ought to have a powerful effect upon our minds, by stirring us up from our lethargy. " If Satan," says an able writer, " watches for an opportunity of taking the word out of our hearts, what remains but that we oppose vigilance to vigilance, and effort to effort ? And since the prize contended for by the powers of darkness is our souls, what a melancholy reflection will it be,

if the disinterested malice of our enemies renders them vigilant and active in seeking their destruction, while we are careless and negligent in seeking their salvation! Satan, conscious that the word of God is capable of elevating us to that pinnacle of happiness whence he fell, contemplates its success with alarm, and spares no artifice or stratagem which his capacious intellect can suggest to obstruct its progress; and if we, by our criminal negligence, turn his ally against ourselves, we shall be guilty of that prodigy of folly and infatuation, which is equally condemned by the councils of heaven and the machinations of hell."

2. *The Unstable.* "Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away." After this the Saviour gives the following interpretation. "But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." This is a far more interesting class than the preceding, for not merely do they hear the word, but they receive it; and not only so, they receive it with joy. Greatly delighted with what they hear, in a spirit of transporting admiration they exclaim, How sublime, how wonderful, how clear, how convincing! Never did we listen to any thing like it. Never were we so charmed in all our days; never have we been so moved and so melted. Such were the raptures with which they heard, and with which they embraced the glad tidings of the gospel. But, alas! these persons, though at present so hopeful, were after all radically defective. The great Teacher, who knew what was in man, and who was never deceived by any outward appearances however fair and imposing, assures

us that all this fervour would come to nought. He saw that those who were now so delighted would very soon become offended; and the cause of this sudden and melancholy transition he assigns, by stating that they had no root in themselves; and that, not having counted the cost, they were unprepared for encountering the difficulties, and withstanding the temptations, to which they were likely to be exposed. We may here observe—

(1.) That cases of this description are far from being uncommon. In all ages of the church have they appeared. The prophet Hosea speaks of those in his time whose “goodness was like the morning cloud, and like the early dew which goeth away.” They are thus compared for the purpose of exhibiting the fickleness of their character, and the evanescence of their religious impressions. More striking images of what is fleeting and transitory could not be found. Look at the morning cloud; it is now dark and lowering; but look again, and it is gone, and gone so entirely, that not the least trace of it remains. So with the early dew; there it is in countless drops, shining like so many glittering diamonds. But as the sun comes forth from his eastern chamber, and begins to scatter abroad his radiant beams, they all speedily disappear. Thus it was with these individuals; their goodness vanished in like manner.

In the present day such are to be found in large numbers. Those who have taken any prominent part in religious efforts, especially in the revival movements of late years, are acquainted with many of this description. Very promising were they at one time. It seemed as if they were inflamed with a holy ambition to win the eternal crown. So determined did they appear at their first outset, that they bid fair to overtake, almost at a single bound, those who had been for years travelling the heavenly road. Such was their earnestness, their fervency, their wrestling importunity, that, on seeing and hearing them, one was reminded of

the words, "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." But where are they now? The sighs of their ministers, and the tears of their friends, furnish us with a mournful and most impressive reply. From the way of truth they have turned aside; they are walking, not in the fear of the Lord, but in the counsel of the ungodly; they are standing in the way of sinners, if not sitting in the seat of the scornful. The fact is undoubted, that many who once made a flaming profession, and whose confidence as to their enjoyment of the divine favour was unmingled with a single fear, are now among the lowest, the most hardened, the most hopeless of men. Just as the rankest soils produce the deadliest fruits; just as nothing descends lower than that which falls from the greatest height.

(2.) The contemplation of such cases, however painful, is in many respects highly important and necessary. It is to be feared that some are far too sanguine and precipitate in regarding persons as having undergone a saving change. We do not mean to imply that every hopeful case should be viewed with doubt and suspicion; but it is well to be cautious at the same time. A bad shilling looks very much like a good one. Both are of the same size, and of the same colour; on both the same image and superscription appear; and because of their striking resemblance the counterfeit is often taken for genuine coin. So with many who name the name of Christ. They are like those of whom it was said to the prophet, "they come before thee as my people;" so regular, so devout, so zealous were they. It is therefore no wonder that they pass for truly, and it may be, eminently, religious persons. Yet, "reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them." The stamp of heaven was never affixed to their character, however fair and imposing for a while it may have been.

Now one of the chief lessons we are taught by this part of the parable is, that we should be jealous both over ourselves and others, even with a godly jealousy. We must never forget that it is not all gold that glitters; that appearances are often exceedingly deceptive; and hence to be able to distinguish between things that differ, is a most needful and valuable attainment. An unhesitating decision concerning the great matter cannot in general be obtained at once. It is necessary to wait for its progressive manifestation in those practical fruits of righteousness, which are to the praise and glory of God. As time is the great comforter, being more effective than any other means, the divine Spirit alone excepted, in healing the wounds of the sorrowful; so is it the great expounder, casting light upon what is obscure, and imparting certainty to what had been doubtful. Without it there is much in the word of truth that cannot be rightly understood, and it is the only sure test whereby the reality of a work of grace in the heart may be satisfactorily ascertained.

3. *The Worldly-minded.* "And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them." "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." The spirit of the world and the spirit of the gospel are in direct antagonism to each other. Christ came to deliver us from this present evil world; and if its love be the ruling principle in our hearts, we cannot have the love of God in us. It is not, however, to the world in its general aspect that the Saviour here refers, but to some of its separate features. These are set forth under the strong and expressive image of thorns; and against them he would have us especially to guard, inasmuch as nothing is more likely to render the word ineffectual. We have to consider—

(1.) The evils incident to straitened circumstances.

“Give me,” was the prayer of Agur, “neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.” It is with the soul as it is with the body; a temperate zone is far more favourable to its well-being and comfort than any other; and those who, like ourselves, are placed at a distance from the oppressive heat of the tropics on the one hand, and the perpetual snows of polar regions on the other, have much to be thankful for to Him, who divides to the nations their inheritance, and fixes the bounds of their habitation. But there are those whose earthly condition is not one of moderate competence; on the contrary, they have to struggle hard for their daily bread. Poverty, it is true, is more favourable to a religious life than great riches, as is evident from the fact that the majority of the Redeemer’s followers in every age have belonged to the lower orders of society. At the same time, such are peculiarly liable to have their minds distracted and tormented with those anxious cares of which our Lord here speaks; and in proportion as they abound they must necessarily choke the word, and render it unfruitful. This is done not only by their drawing off the attention from divine things, but in their inordinate indulgence a spirit of unbelief is clearly involved. The truth, we are assured, cannot profit unless it be mixed with faith in them that hear it; and such as cannot trust God for the necessities of life, are not likely to repose that firm confidence in his word, which is indispensable to the enjoyment of its blessings.

(2.) The perils connected with the possession of wealth. In the phrase, “the deceitfulness of riches,” there is much that is solemn and admonitory. That this quality belongs to them is undoubted. A deceitful man is one who is not what he appears to be. And are riches what they appear to be? Do they yield all the

satisfaction which they promise? Most certainly not. Then how deceitful are they as regards continuance! A false friend not only professes to be what he is not in reality, but is sure to prove treacherous, by deserting those who have placed confidence in him. Now, to trust in riches is to trust in what, of all uncertain things, are the most uncertain. "Nothing is permanent," as one observes, "belonging to man, except his inconstancy"; so we can say that nothing is certain concerning riches, but their uncertainty. "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." They are no less deceitful as regards the pleas adduced by way of vindicating their pursuit. Diligence in business, lawful industry, prudent forethought, family claims, means of usefulness; such are the plausible forms which covetousness assumes, and by which it seeks to impose upon its votaries. Above all, how delusive are riches in their influence, which is the feature that is here principally intended. What a hold do they imperceptibly get upon the mind; how seductively do they entwine around all its feelings and affections, even as ivy entwines around the oak! Having gradually obtained full possession of the soul, the desire of wealth becomes insatiable. The sea, tossed into foam by the raging hurricane, will ere long subside into tranquillity; the most ravenous animals—lions, tigers, vultures—after they have allayed their hunger, are satisfied, and seek repose; yea, the most savage warriors, wearied with the work of destruction, have sheathed their swords, and returned home to divide their spoils and wear their laurels: but the passion for riches, more restless than the ocean, more voracious than beasts of prey, more cruel than the grasping ambition of kings and conquerors, hurries on its devotees without either pause or bound, and with the greediness of the grave, never thinks of saying, "It

is enough !” Now to expect the fruits of the gospel to flourish in such a soil, is to expect an utter impossibility. To look

“For mellow grapes beneath the icy pole,
Or blooming roses on the cheek of death,”

would not be more preposterous and irrational.

In addition to the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, one of the evangelists speaks of “the lust of other things;” an expression which shows that many additional influences of a worldly nature are at work, whose direct tendency is to choke the good seed, and render the soul unfruitful. It is not said “the lust of *sinful* things;” in themselves they may not be unlawful; and, indeed, our greatest danger more frequently arises from the abuse of what is innocent, than from indulging in what is actually wrong.

4. *The Fruitful.* “He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty.” Hitherto there has been nothing but disappointment in connection with the several classes which have passed under review. They differed considerably from each other, but all came short, though in various degrees, and from various causes. Whether, as with the first, it was owing to the utterly ungenial nature of the soil, which afforded no opportunity for the precious seed to enter in; or whether, as with the second, the failure was in consequence of its meeting with only a partial sympathy, and receiving a mere temporary entertainment; or whether, as with the third, it was produced by a rival growth of choking thorns and thistles: in all, however, the result was the same, for no fruit appeared, and thus the expectations of the sower were unrealized, and his efforts unrewarded. But at last another and very different class is presented, the con-

temptation of which is rendered peculiarly refreshing, from the striking contrast it affords. It is like coming to "an oasis in the desert; an island of verdure, amidst an ocean of sand."

"Blessed," said our Lord, "are they that hear the word of God, *and keep it.*" This was done by the class before us, and this we must do if we would inherit the blessing which he pronounced. There is a three-fold sense in which the phrase may be regarded, and in each it will apply to these characters.

(1.) They kept it in their hearts, and nourished it there by devout meditation. The words in Luke speak of their keeping it in an honest and good heart; a heart made such by the power of divine grace, and not through any natural excellence of their own. When the mind is duly prepared, when it is renewed and enlightened, the word will be received according to its true import; for it is said of these persons that they not only hear, but understand it, which was not the case with either of the former classes. The word of Christ dwelt in them richly in all wisdom, though with greater fulness in some than in others; and by seriously pondering it a deep conviction was obtained of its real character and claims, of its peculiar excellence and supreme importance.

Let us be anxious to keep it in like manner. Let us hide it in our hearts, and make it our daily meditation. Unless we cultivate such a spirit our hearing will profit us but little. It is meditation that engrafts the truth in the mind, and makes it like a nail fastened in a sure place by the master of assemblies.

(2.) They kept it by reducing it to practice, and regulating their lives by its directions. The fruits of holy obedience are pre-eminently those which God requires. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." It should

therefore be our great concern to resemble those who said to David, "Thy servants are ready to do whatsoever the king shall appoint." With the awakened and convicted persecutor our constant inquiry should be, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" In the strains of our modern Psalmist we should sincerely and earnestly say,

"Make me to walk in thy commands,
'Tis a delightful road ;
Nor let my head, or heart, or hands,
Offend against my God."

In bringing forth the practical fruits of righteousness, we must not be satisfied with a low standard. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." This latter description of hearers, though all were fruitful, yet they were not equally so. Some produced a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty. It is true that the day of small things is not to be despised; but to rest satisfied with a thirty-fold return is unreasonable and ungrateful, when the great Master has promised to all his true followers a hundred-fold reward.

(3.) They kept it as a precious treasure, which nothing could induce them to part with. As we have seen, the rocky-ground hearers in some sense received the truth, but they afterwards sold it; these, however, held it fast, knowing full well that it was their life. Difficulties they had to contend with, but they still brought forth fruit with patience; and thus by stedfast continuance in well-doing, they sought for glory, honour, and immortality, which at length they undoubtedly attained.

The subject which has now occupied our thoughts loudly calls for self-examination. Among the four classes into which the hearers of the gospel are here divided, only one was fruitful; and how necessary is

it for us seriously to inquire to which do we belong ! If such a ratio is to be regarded as setting forth the actual state of our congregations, how mournful, how truly alarming is the consideration ! Three out of every four listening to the words of eternal life in vain ! Three souls lost, to one soul saved ! Lost most assuredly all will be who receive not the truth in the love of it ; no other portion awaits them but that of utter destruction. “ For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God : but that which beareth thorns and briars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing ; whose end is to be burned. But beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.” May, in our case, the fearful doom which these words describe be averted ! May the confident hope they express be happily fulfilled !

THE TARES AND WHEAT.

ANOTHER PARABLE PUT HE FORTH UNTO THEM, SAYING, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKENED UNTO A MAN WHICH SOWED GOOD SEED IN HIS FIELD : BUT WHILE MEN SLEPT, HIS ENEMY CAME AND SOWED TARES AMONG THE WHEAT, AND WENT HIS WAY. BUT WHEN THE BLADE WAS SPRUNG UP, AND BROUGHT FORTH FRUIT, THEN APPEARED THE TARES ALSO. SO THE SERVANTS OF THE HOUSEHOLDER CAME AND SAID UNTO HIM, SIR, DIDST NOT THOU SOW GOOD SEED IN THY FIELD ? FROM WHENCE THEN HATH IT TARES ? HE SAID UNTO THEM, AN ENEMY HATH DONE THIS. THE SERVANTS SAID UNTO HIM, WILT THOU THEN THAT WE GO AND GATHER THEM UP ? BUT HE SAID, NAY ; LEST WHILE YE GATHER UP THE TARES, &c.—Mat. xiii. 24—30.

THIS chapter contains no less than seven parables. But two are distinguished from the rest by their greater length, and also by the important circumstance that they are fully explained by our Lord himself. In both the imagery employed is similar, and in some of its features identical ; but in their design the parable of the sower and that of the tares are totally different. We have now to consider the latter, which we shall do in the following order. We have—

I. A BENEFICENT OPERATION.—“The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field.” By availing ourselves of the interpretation which was subsequently given, we shall be at no loss in understanding what is here intended.

1. The man that sowed was Jesus. This was his special work during his public life on earth. “He went about all Galilee,” it is said, “teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom.” And this is his work still. Not as he did formerly, it is true, but by means of those whom he has sent to proclaim his word, even to the ends of the earth. “And

came," says the apostle, when writing to the Ephesians, "and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh." It is well known that the Saviour never preached to them in person, for it was after his ascension to heaven that the glad tidings first reached them. The meaning is that he did it through his servants as ambassadors deputed by him. It is in his name, and by his authority, that those who are now engaged in the work of the ministry, address their fellow-creatures. They beseech men, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled to God.

2. The good seed are the righteous. In the former parable it is said to be the word of God; but the difference between the two representations is not so great as at first sight appears. There the word is set forth in itself, as being the instrument of regeneration, or the appointed means whereby the children of wrath are made children of the kingdom. Here, however, it is regarded, not in the abstract, but as received into the heart, and thus incorporated with the believer, so as to become part and parcel of himself. Such is the union between them, so close, so vital, and so pervading, that the two cannot any more be contemplated asunder. As through the reception of Christ the renewed soul is made one with him; in like manner the reception of the truth induces a similar identity between it and those in whom it dwells.

3. The field is the world. Whether this is to be understood in its general and most comprehensive acceptation, or whether it signifies the church in the world, it is not easy to determine. But as the subject introduced is the kingdom of heaven, the latter opinion is, on the whole, the more probable. Such is the view taken by Trench, who says, "The term 'world,' which is here used, need not perplex us in the least: it *was* the world, and therefore was rightly called so, till the seed was sown in it; but henceforth was the world no longer.

No narrower word would have sufficed for Him, in whose prophetic eye the word of the gospel was contemplated as going forth into all lands, as a seed scattered in every part of the great out-field of the nations."

II. A MALICIOUS DEED.—"But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." What is here said to have been done was as atrocious an act as can well be conceived. Happily it is not a thing of ordinary occurrence, with us at least; although it is said that in Ireland a spirit of revenge has before now shown itself in this way. In India it is not unusual, and in ancient times it would seem that the practice was very common; so much so, that the old Roman law had a special enactment on the subject. But we notice—

1. *The Agent.* That the sowing of tares among the wheat was the work of an enemy is sufficiently obvious; and we are expressly told that he was none other than the great adversary, even the devil. He is called here, as in the former parable, "the wicked one," and such he truly is, being emphatically, absolutely, supremely evil. His great object is to obstruct, in every way, the cause of Christ, and to ruin the souls of men. Knowing full well that the word of truth is the great instrument whereby the Saviour's kingdom is advanced, he seeks to corrupt it by means of deadly errors on the one hand, and by the introduction into Christian fellowship of false professors on the other. Traitors in the camp are always regarded as the most dangerous foes; and such are all unregenerate persons who have found admittance as members, and especially as ministers, into the church.

2. *The Season.* It was "while men slept." It is said of the ungodly "that they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil;" and in the

preference they thus evince they resemble him whose children they are, and whose works they do. There is nothing he hates so much as the light, for there is nothing so contrary to his nature, and so unfavourable to his designs. As John Bunyan says, "My Lord Understanding's house was too light for the Prince of Darkness, and therefore he built a high wall to darken all the windows." Now it was in the night, the time when the servants were asleep, that Satan went and sowed the tares. He thus did the mischief unperceived, and after so far gratifying his infernal malice, we are told that he went his way.

3. *The Result.* For a while no indications of the damage which had been done appeared. Weeks and months passed by without any suspicion that the enemy had been at work, and done his utmost, if not to destroy, yet most materially to injure the anticipated crop. It appears that there was great similarity between tares and wheat in the early stages of their growth, and it was not until the blade or stalk had attained considerable maturity that they became distinguishable. But when the ear was formed, and the fruit appeared, it was quite evident that the spoiler had been there, as evident as if his steps had been traced at the time, and he were actually caught in the act of scattering the noxious seed.

III. A NATURAL REQUEST.—"So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them." It may at once be taken for granted that these words are not to be so construed, as to forbid the exercise of Christian discipline, or even the expulsion of those from the church who have openly

dishonoured their profession. On this subject the scriptures are so clear and express, that we may be quite certain there is nothing in this parabolic representation that is opposed to the many precepts which are given elsewhere. What then is forbidden here? Some suppose that it is the employment of secular power for the suppression of error, and the punishment of heretics and other notorious sinners. "Our Lord," as one remarks, "is to be understood as prohibiting all civil coercion, and every species of persecution, on religious grounds; all infliction of punishment upon men by his servants, his ministers, which should be a rooting up of the tares, and thus doing the work of the harvest before the time of harvest, a work reserved to Christ alone."

But while religious persecution in every form is directly opposed to what this parable teaches, as it is to the whole tenor of the New Testament; yet there is another, and we believe more excellent way of explaining these words. The object of the servants in the request they made was so to clear the field as that it should contain nothing but pure grain. It was thus a commendable object which they had in view; and no less commendable is it to seek the purity of the church, and make it in all respects what its divine Founder intended it to be. But the question is not as to whether the object be laudable, but rather whether it be practicable? A Christian community, for example, may abound with professors who have little or none of the spirit of Christ. Not that they indulge in any open immorality; they may, on the contrary, bear a general resemblance to the true children of God; just as the tares resembled the wheat, resembled it very closely for a length of time, and even to the end there was some similarity between the one and the other. Those therefore whose lives are disgraced by gross profanity should be altogether dismissed from our thoughts, for it is evident, that with such the present parable has

nothing to do. But in the absence of all that is outwardly scandalous, there are persons who greatly dishonour that worthy name by which they are called; and those who possess any measure of spiritual discernment may well suspect, if not feel a confident assurance, that they are without the root of the matter. Their want of spirituality is so evident, their minds are so worldly, their tempers are so repulsive, their self-consequence is so overbearing, their observance of many important duties is so remiss, the interest they take in all that relates to the great cause is so languid; these, and many other things equally inconsistent, render them stumbling blocks in the way, and they are felt to be a dead weight by which the energies of the church are repressed, and its usefulness most seriously obstructed. The feeling, therefore, is deep and general, that nothing would be more desirable than to get rid of them altogether. Now such being the case, would it not be well to take decided measures at once, and make an entire riddance of all such unworthy members? The answer is, No; it would not be well: and to prove that it would not, there are two reasons which may be adduced. From attempting such a work we are debarred, in the first place, on account of—

1. *Its Difficulty.* It seems that the apostles and early Christians were endowed with a peculiar gift, called the “discerning of spirits,” so that for them to separate the precious from the vile might have been an easy matter. But this parable was intended for the instruction of the church in all ages; and as that was only a temporary endowment, it may be confidently stated that it is a task for which we are incompetent. There are two things which we do not know, and by our ignorance in both respects, we are altogether disqualified for such an undertaking. One is, we do not know what degree of imitation is compatible with a total absence of true piety. That men may go very far,

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and yet be entirely destitute of saving grace, is a truth which it is impossible for any one to deny; but to draw a clear line of demarcation between what is counterfeit and what is genuine, is beyond our power. On the other hand, we do not know what degree of imperfection may co-exist with true piety. That many glaring and lamentable defects have appeared in persons of real godliness is undoubted; but, as in the above case, we cannot define the precise boundary, and say how much that is contrary to God's will is compatible with the enjoyment of God's favour. These considerations show how difficult, yea, how impossible it is for us to exclude from Christian fellowship all such as are not really entitled to its privileges. For the visible church and the invisible to be so identical, that none were found in the former that did not belong to the latter, would be in the highest degree desirable; but for us to seek to bring about such an identity, and be determined to tolerate no unconverted characters within its sacred enclosure, would be to attempt that to which we are not called, and for which we are obviously not qualified. After the utmost care and caution, some unworthy ones would continue undetected; and, which would be far more serious, some would be turned out who ought to have been allowed to remain in. This leads us to the second reason why we are forbidden to undertake such a work, for in addition to its difficulty there is—

2. *Its danger.* “But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.” Intermixed as they were, it would be almost impossible, even were they sufficiently distinguishable, to uproot the one without damage being done to the other. But so careful was the owner to preserve the young wheat from injury, that he regarded it as the least evil of the two, for both to be left alone for the present. Now there is nothing we should more dread

than to injure one of the most insignificant and defective of the true children of the kingdom. So precious are they in God's sight, that he who touches them, touches the apple of his eye. If through our unhalloved zeal, our rashness and precipitancy, we were to cause any weak brother to perish, and thus destroy him for whom Christ died, we should incur no ordinary guilt, and expose ourselves to the most fearful punishment. If we saw a person conducting another to the edge of some lofty cliff, at whose base the foaming billows of the ocean were dashing; and if on arriving there he were to fasten about him a large millstone, and then hurl him headlong over the awful precipice; would not such a spectacle fill us with inconceivable horror? But the Saviour assures us in the most emphatic manner, that it would be far preferable for us to be thus treated, than for us to do anything that would be detrimental to the meanest of his disciples. "Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

The preceding remarks lead to, and are closely connected with, the last particular that is set before us, in which we have—

IV. AN IMPORTANT DECISION.—"Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." It thus appears that the work of separation which had been previously forbidden was only delayed for a season; and the postponement is to be regarded as a striking manifestation of His tender mercy, who of old was ready, for the sake of ten righteous persons, to spare the whole city of Sodom, notwithstanding the abounding wickedness of its inhabitants. But concerning this separation there are four things to be noticed.

1. The period when it will take place. It will be at the time of harvest, which harvest, we are told, is "the end of the world." Then the Lord will come to bring to light the hidden deeds of darkness, to adjust every inequality, and to wind up all human affairs. The time of probation will then terminate; the vast scheme of providence will reach its consummation; and the glorious purposes of redemption will be completely answered. On the part of the impenitent, the measure of their iniquity will be full; while as regards the saints, their trials will be ended, and their graces, now in the best defective, will have attained their full growth and perfect maturity.

2. The instruments to whom the work will be committed. "The reapers are the angels;" those blessed beings who are altogether free from the manifold infirmities by which we are now encompassed—ignorance, selfishness, prejudice, impatience, partiality, animosity. They, however, although uninfluenced by such feelings, will act under the immediate direction of the Son of man, who will then appear in his glory. It is before him that the separation will be made; and thus the fact of its taking place in his presence, and under his omniscient eye, will preserve these holy though finite spirits from any possibility of mistake. Then will be gathered out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity. The division will be complete, and the sincere and hypocritical will no longer be mingled together.

3. The manner in which it will be accomplished. Not only will the tares be uprooted, but they will be bound in separate bundles. According to the old saying, "Like loves like, all the world over." Such, at all events, is now the case; and there is nothing that the wicked more abominate than the company of the righteous, whose tastes are so contrary to their own. And not only is their presence repugnant on account of their

dispositions being so opposite, but their exemplary conduct condemns them. In the book of Revelation we read of two witnesses who were clothed in sackcloth, of whom it is said, "that they tormented them that dwelt on the earth." But how did they torment them? Not by persecution, for of that they were themselves the subjects. They were God's witnesses, and it was through the testimony they bore, by their lips and in their lives, to his truth and holiness, that they so greatly annoyed and exasperated the world of the ungodly. Hence the apostle states, "Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." This is doubtless the secret of that intense and deadly hatred which sinful men in all ages have felt towards the people of God. But while hitherto nothing has given them greater relief and satisfaction than to get rid of the righteous altogether, and be surrounded by none but such as were like minded with themselves; yet the time is coming when that association with their own kind will be to their sorrow, and not to their joy. They will then find their own companions to be their greatest tormentors. Lions may agree with lions, tigers with tigers, and wolves with wolves; but the wicked, the proud, the selfish, the malicious, the implacable, will, by their raging passions and mutual reproaches, inconceivably heighten each other's misery.

4. The final results which will follow. "Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles, to burn them." The wicked are to be cast into a furnace of fire, the flames of which will never be quenched. Well indeed may the solemn question be asked, and deeply should it be pondered, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

On the other hand, the wheat will be safely gathered into the heavenly garner. Every true member of the

church on earth will be admitted to the general assembly and church of the first-born above. All the children of the kingdom will take possession of their glorious inheritance, even the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. Their many imperfections will be left behind, and arrayed in the beauties of holiness, they will have neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing. Their days of mourning will be ended; their darkness, their reproach, their obscurity, will be for ever passed away. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." May we so hear, as to attend to these things, and lay them seriously to heart. Let it be our great concern to be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord our God; thus shall we be acknowledged by him as his own, and he will make us to be numbered with his saints in glory everlasting.

THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS.

WHOSOEVER COMETH TO ME, AND HEARETH MY SAYINGS, AND DOETH THEM, I WILL SHOW YOU TO WHOM HE IS LIKE : HE IS LIKE A MAN WHICH BUILT AN HOUSE, AND DIGGED DEEP, AND LAID THE FOUNDATION ON A ROCK : AND WHEN THE FLOOD AROSE, THE STREAM BEAT VEHEMENTLY UPON THAT HOUSE, AND COULD NOT SHAKE IT ; FOR IT WAS FOUNDED UPON A ROCK. BUT HE THAT HEARETH, AND DOETH NOT, IS LIKE A MAN THAT, WITHOUT A FOUNDATION, BUILT AN HOUSE UPON THE EARTH ; AGAINST WHICH THE STREAM DID BEAT VEHEMENTLY, AND IMMEDIATELY IT FELL ; AND THE RUIN OF THAT HOUSE WAS GREAT. Luke vi. 47-49.

To no subject did the Saviour more frequently refer than the worthlessness of a formal profession of religion. He was surrounded by those who prided themselves upon their outward piety, while totally destitute of vital godliness. Their high pretensions he openly denounced, and their gross hypocrisy he faithfully exposed, though he knew full well that by so doing he would incur their sore displeasure. It was thus he was engaged on the present occasion, for after having made many searching statements he asks, " And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ? " He then concludes his discourse with the passage contained in the words before us. Let us notice,

I. THE CHARACTERS DESCRIBED.—" Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like." Here three important features are pointed out, as pertaining to every true disciple.

1. He applies to Christ. As guilty creatures, we are to go to him for pardon ; as wretched, for consolation ; as helpless, for strength ; as ignorant, for instruction.

2. He listens to the words of Christ. He does so with earnest attention, with deep humility, with solemn reverence, and especially with implicit faith.

3. He yields obedience to the commands of Christ. To hear his sayings is a blessed privilege, but they are not to be heard as matters of mere speculation. We should hear in order to know, and know in order to obey. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." Our obedience should be prompt, willing, impartial, persevering.

II. THE COMPARISON EMPLOYED.—"He is like a man which built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock."

1. The edifice he erected. In building a house many things have to be attended to, but the first and most important is to secure a good foundation. That is not always easily obtained, for in the case before us the man had to dig deep, an operation attended with much toil and difficulty. But it is labour well bestowed, as every wise builder is fully conscious.

2. The danger to which it was exposed. Floods were very common in Palestine, and their force was so great, that they often swept away everything before them. Such are persecutions, afflictions, and temptations. The Psalmist speaks of "the floods of great waters," and knew, by painful experience, what it was to be surrounded by them.

3. The manner in which it stood the trial. "The stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it." So it is with those who maintain their integrity, steadfast and immovable, though exposed to all kinds of evil influences. How severely was John the Baptist tried, but, like this house, his principles remained unshaken. Job, also; his confidence in God was tested to the utmost, but he was still enabled to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

4. The cause of its stability. "For it was founded upon a rock." They alone are safe whose hopes are built upon Him who is the rock of ages. In the wildest storms they have nothing to fear. Whatever else may fail, he will never disappoint the expectations of the humblest believer.

"Yea, sooner, all the hills shall flee,
And hide themselves beneath the sea ;
The ocean, starting from its bed,
Leap o'er the cloud-capt mountain's head ;
The sun, exhausted of his light,
Shall make a universal night,
And ruin spread from pole to pole,—
Than Jesus fail the tempted soul."

III. THE CONTRAST PRESENTED.—"But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth ; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell ; and the ruin of that house was great."

1. The foolish course he pursued. He neglected the main thing, and being regardless of that, his concern about other matters was altogether unavailing. It is probable that in all other respects the building was every thing that could be desired—commodious, well-arranged, imposing in its appearance. But it was an house without a foundation, or at least without a suitable and solid one.

2. The terrible catastrophe which followed. "And immediately it fell ; and the ruin of that house was great." Any one might have foretold what the result would be ; and, doubtless, the foolish builder had often been warned of the consequences. But, like sinners still, he would have his own way ; and here we see what it led to.

In applying this subject we would say, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, *deceiving your own selves*. There are many ways in which we may do so,

and the present discourse calls upon us to be especially upon our guard in reference to the following particulars. Let us not deceive ourselves—

1. By being satisfied with a fair exterior. An imposing profession is one thing; to be savingly united to Christ, to be rooted and grounded in him, is another thing.

2. With the notion that the laborious and self-denying efforts in which the godly are engaged are unnecessary. We are to strive to enter in at the strait gate; we are to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.

3. That the calm and sunshine which are now enjoyed will be permanent. There may be no appearance of a storm at present; but not to expect it, and not to prepare for it, is irrational in the extreme.

4. That matters will turn out in the end more favourably than some gloomy prognosticators anticipate. Such is the doctrine which the father of lies has been preaching from the beginning; but to this error of the wicked one and his emissaries, let us not give heed. “Whose end is destruction,” is the language of God’s word; and let God be true, though all beside were liars.

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

THEREFORE IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN LIKENED UNTO A CERTAIN KING, WHICH WOULD TAKE ACCOUNT OF HIS SERVANTS. AND WHEN HE HAD BEGUN TO RECKON, ONE WAS BROUGHT UNTO HIM, WHICH OWED HIM TEN THOUSAND TALENTS. BUT FORASMUCH AS HE HAD NOT TO PAY, HIS LORD COMMANDED HIM TO BE SOLD, AND HIS WIFE, AND CHILDREN, AND ALL THAT HE HAD, AND PAYMENT TO BE MADE. THE SERVANT THEREFORE FELL DOWN, AND WORSHIPPED HIM, SAYING, LORD, HAVE PATIENCE WITH ME, AND I WILL PAY THEE ALL. THEN THE LORD OF THAT SERVANT WAS MOVED WITH COMPASSION, AND LOOSED HIM, AND FORGAVE HIM THE DEBT. BUT THE SAME SERVANT WENT OUT, AND FOUND ONE OF HIS FELLOW-SERVANTS WHICH OWED AN HUNDRED PENCE, &c. *Mat. xviii. 23-35.*

As this parable is immediately connected with the preceding verses, it will be necessary for us to notice, in the first place—

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED TO ITS DELIVERY.—Our Saviour had been giving instructions to his disciples concerning the method to be pursued in seeking the restoration of an offending brother; and well would it have been if the rules he lays down, so simple, so reasonable, and also so practicable, were universally acted upon. Their observance would have prevented those scenes of strife, those bitter animosities and contentions among Christian brethren, which have been so common in all ages of the history of the church; scenes over which angels might weep, were it possible for their eyes to be dimmed with tears, and over which infernal spirits could not fail to rejoice with malignant joy.

As the directions which our Lord gave on this subject clearly implied that the injured party should be ready to forgive, Peter inquires to what extent this placable

disposition should be exercised. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven." The Jews taught that a man was to grant forgiveness as far as the third offence, but no further. Peter, however, being well aware that the precepts of Christ in all cases went beyond those maxims which prevailed among his countrymen, more than doubled that number. He seems to take it for granted that there must be some limit, and by fixing upon seven times, he doubtless thought that he displayed a spirit of expansive charity, and that more than this could not be expected from human nature. But if Peter went considerably beyond the Jewish traditions, the Saviour went not merely as much beyond Peter, but left him at an immeasurable distance behind. "I say not unto thee, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven." This expression evidently signifies an indefinite number, and shows that by no calculations of arithmetic should a forgiving spirit be regulated or confined.

The duty which is here enjoined is diametrically opposed to every malevolent, vindictive, and revengeful feeling. To cherish ill-will, to render evil for evil, to endeavour in any way to injure those who have done us wrong, is altogether contrary to the spirit of the gospel, and the example of Christ. At the same time, we may feel hurt, yea, we may feel angry. All anger is certainly not sinful, for while the scriptures never say, Be drunk, or swear, or lie, and sin not; it does say, "Be ye angry, and sin not." It is a natural and innocent passion, though it may be improperly directed, and easily carried to excess. Besides, how often does God speak of himself as being angry, which is plainly more than a figure of speech. If they are figurative expressions in which his displeasure is declared, those must also be figurative which assure us that his approbation may be secured,

that his *favour* is life, and that with the grateful offerings of his people he is well *pleased*. The pacified conscience of the believer bears witness to the literal truth of these expressions, and the guilty conscience of many a miserable sinner testifies that the former cannot be explained away in such a manner. We may therefore feel angry with our brother when he has injured us; what is forbidden is being angry with him without cause. Only let us beware of confounding this feeling with those passions of resentment and animosity in which our evil hearts are so prone to indulge.

There is also another consideration to which it is necessary to advert, in order to have a correct and scriptural view of the matter. It is set forth in those words of our Lord, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him: and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." It is here plainly shown that the offender should come and ask for forgiveness. However frequent it may be sought, it is our duty, with all readiness and cheerfulness, to grant it: but it is as clearly his duty to seek it. We are also shown in what spirit it should be sought, namely, a spirit of contrition; "if he *repent*, forgive him." It does not seem that we are required, in the absence of these conditions, to hold out the hand of reconciliation, and declare that the grievance shall be buried and forgotten. We do not think that even He who is promised to help our infirmities, enables any one to forgive except under such circumstances. The special work of the Holy Spirit is that of restoring us to the likeness of God, and making us perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. Now his forgiveness is only extended to the penitent; and we certainly are not required to go beyond him. We are to forgive *as* he forgives: and inasmuch as he makes repentance an indispensable prerequisite, it evidently

follows that we should make it an indispensable prerequisite also. Because he forgives us, we are to forgive others ; and we are to do it in the same manner, and upon the same terms.

With these qualifying remarks, we shall say no more at present on the general subject of brotherly forgiveness. Any additional observations that may be required for enforcing this important duty, we shall reserve to the close of the discourse. Let us now proceed to the parable before us, and consider—

II. THE SEVERAL PARTS OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED.—
“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.” This king is doubtless intended to represent the Most High, and it is very necessary that that aspect of the divine character which this similitude exhibits should be frequently and devoutly pondered by us. In some of the parables he is represented as a shepherd, a husbandman, a master, a parent ; and in each of these titles much that is interesting and important is involved. In the comparison which is here employed the leading ideas are those of greatness, power, absolute supremacy, and inconceivable majesty. Earthly sovereigns are, however, at best, but inadequate types of the eternal King ; all that they are invested with are only faint shadows of the authority he exercises, and the ineffable grandeur in which he is arrayed. Of him it can be truly said, that he reflects splendour “upon all that is fair, subordinates to himself all that is great, and sits enthroned on the riches of the universe.”

But though he is exalted above all blessing and praise, he is not too high to attend to the concerns of his creatures. In the conceptions entertained by heathens of their deities, the most prominent features are those of cruelty on the one hand, and indifference on the other. By many of them, especially the ignorant masses, their gods are regarded as objects of dread ; they look upon

them as armed with bolts of vengeance, and giving fearful tokens of their displeasure. Hence the bloody rites which are performed, and the innumerable sacrifices which are offered, the sole design of which is to propitiate those terrible powers, and turn them from their fierce anger. But by another class, the more refined and philosophic, they were regarded as inhabiting some immeasurably distant region, where they enjoyed themselves in a state of voluptuous repose, without ever deigning to interfere with anything so ignoble as human affairs; and thus it was supposed that the world was virtually abandoned to chance or fate. The wicked might sin on without fearing their frowns, and the good might toil up the steep and rugged paths of virtue, without being once cheered and stimulated by their smiles. But very different are the views which are given of the true God throughout the whole of the sacred oracles. He is to be feared, it is true, but love and mercy are the distinguishing properties of his character; while, instead of being indifferent, his eyes are ever upon the children of men, and he holds them responsible for all their doings. In accordance with this truth the king is here represented as giving personal attention to his affairs, and demands an account from his servants as to how matters stood between them and him.

But to proceed with the narrative before us. It first presents to our notice—

1. A servant in debt to his sovereign. From the particulars which are stated, it seems that he was not an ordinary or domestic servant, but a provincial governor or officer of state. The highest functionaries in our country, even the prime minister himself, is called the queen's servant: and it is most probable that in some such high sense the term is here employed. Concerning his debt we observe that—

(1.) Its amount was exceedingly great. "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king,

which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents." It is not stated whether the talents were of gold or silver; but it is most likely that the latter are intended. "In all numbers," says Bloomfield, "occurring in ancient authors, gold is never to be supposed unless mentioned." A talent of silver was worth £243 15s. of our money; so that ten thousand of these would amount to an immense sum. It is doubtless intended to show to what a fearful extent we are indebted to God "Is not," asks one of Job's friends, "thy wickedness great, and thine iniquities infinite?" "For innumerable evils," says David, "have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me." Conscience often presents to the awakened sinner a truly appalling list; but however faithful that inward monitor is supposed to be, such a one, when reminded of repeated offences, committed day after day through the successive periods of his life, can venture to say, "behold, the half hath not been told me." If a bill were drawn, including every separate item—all the evil desires we have cherished, all the idle words we have spoken, all the duties we have neglected, all the precious time we have wasted, all the mercies we have abused, as well as all the actual transgressions we have committed; it would tire the hand of an angel to write down the particulars, even in the case of a single individual.

(2.) This servant being unable to meet his heavy liabilities, the claims of justice are advanced. "But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made." According to our law, the person of a debtor may be seized, and also his property, but his family cannot be touched. In ancient

times it was otherwise ; a man's wife and children were regarded as his goods and chattels, and could be sold as slaves. To such a custom this parable alludes, and the passage before us should therefore be viewed, not in the light of modern civilization, but in connection with those institutions which existed in former ages, and which belonged to a state of society very different from that with which we are familiar in our own highly-favoured land.

At the same time, while the civil law in this country can only lay hold upon the individual offender, the consequences of a sinful course are by no means confined to the person himself. Let a father be addicted to drink, or waste his property by gambling, and those who are dependent upon him will suffer through his misconduct. Let him bring dishonour on his own name, and it will be transferred to all his household, and even handed down as a legacy of shame to his posterity. Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children is thus a law of nature and of providence : and as long as some are dependent upon others, there will be such a thing as vicarious suffering, or one enduring what only another has deserved.

(3.) To arrest the execution of the sentence which had been pronounced, a humble and earnest plea is presented. "The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." The word "worship" is used in two senses, that of civil homage and religious adoration ; and we can only ascertain which of these is meant in any given instance, by regarding the connection in which the term is found. In one passage it is said, "they worshipped the Lord and the king ;" but while homage was rendered to both, it was not the same kind of homage. In the words before us it is obviously not divine worship that is intended, but that profound obeisance which subjects are accustomed to render to

their rulers. Having prostrated himself before his lord, the servant appeals to his clemency and forbearance ; and so far he is worthy of our imitation. Acknowledging, as he did, the mighty debt we owe, let us fall at the footstool of the Divine Majesty, and implore the mercy which we so greatly need. Thus only can the awful calamity to which we are exposed be averted, even our committal to that prison from which we shall not be liberated till we have paid the last mite.

But when this debtor promises that if only sufficient time be given to him, he would discharge the enormous liabilities under which he lay, he evidently promises what he could never perform. And not less preposterous are the expectations which many entertain of being able by their future endeavours to render compensation to an offended Deity for their past delinquencies. No efforts however active, no integrity however upright, no charitable performances however costly, no observance of religious exercises however regular, no penitence however deep, no sufferings however protracted, can contribute in the least to the settlement of the account which has been so long running between us and God, and which will consign us to a state of eternal bankruptcy, unless some other method of extrication be provided. It is well if we have been brought to renounce all such vain and visionary hopes, and if our feelings are those which the poet expresses in the well-known words :

“ Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil thy law's demands ;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone ;
Thou must save, and thou alone.”

(4.) Touched with a feeling of tenderness and pity, the king relinquishes his claims, and extends to the debtor a free and full pardon. “ Then the lord of that

servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt." This was more than he had asked for, his petition being only for the indulgence of delay. But to his great joy as well as surprise, there was granted to him, not merely a longer season of forbearance, but an immediate and unconditional remission of the vast sum which he owed. His earnest cries, his sore distress, as well as the bitter agony of his poor wife and children, excited the compassion of his royal master, and he was induced to exercise that mercy which "becomes the throned monarch better than his crown."

And what is the character of Him with whom we have to do? He is rich in mercy, he is full of compassion, he is waiting to be gracious, and ready to forgive. Whatever the liabilities of the poor sinner may be; should he feel that ten thousand talents are an inadequate representation of the debt he has contracted; were he fully persuaded that his transgressions in their number exceeded all calculation, and in their vileness and enormity surpassed all thought: yet, "let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

The object of this parable was not to show the grounds on which divine forgiveness is bestowed. In other parts of the sacred volume this is clearly done, as when the apostle states, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." We refer to this point, because many suppose that the view which is here given renders the atonement unnecessary, and that the great Lord of all might do of his own free will what was done in the case before us. In an interesting work entitled, "British Hearts and Hands," we have the above sentiment expressed in a homely way by one of the navvies with whom the authoress was one day conversing. He said, "I am a poor fellow—make no profession—yet I have a quarrel with a mate—I feel that I hate him, and

resolve to drub him the next time we light on one another. But I afterwards think better of it—offer him half my bread and cheese when we meet, and we're friends. Now, why can't God do a generous action like that, and forgive us outright?"

This is not the place to enter at any length into such a question. We merely remark, that private quarrels between two individuals are totally different from offences committed against the law of the land; and that the relation in which we stand to the Supreme Being is that of subjects to a sovereign, or criminals to a judge. An earthly ruler, it is true, has the power of exercising mercy, but this is only done in exceptional cases, and when there are some mitigating circumstances which seem to warrant an interference with the ordinary course of justice. It is not for us to say that the Most High could not, in some isolated instances of a similar character, suspend the infliction of the threatened punishment, out of his own sovereign will and pleasure; but, happily for us, it was not mere exceptional cases that the purposes of his mercy embraced. He contemplated the salvation of countless myriads, and among them not a few of the most daring and determined rebels that ever lived. Were an earthly sovereign to forgive every transgressor, the statutes of the realm would be disregarded, the government would lose all its authority, everything would be in a state of confusion, and neither life nor property would be secure. But in the glorious scheme which infinite wisdom devised, and which infinite compassion prompted, although the amnesty proclaimed is so comprehensive, yet the whole is arranged in such a manner that pardon can be extended without infringing upon the claims of justice, while the law is upheld in its high supremacy, even were its condemning sentence remitted in the case of every offender.

But we have now to contemplate another scene. In that which has already passed under review, we found a servant in debt to his sovereign; here we have—

2. One servant in debt to another ; even to him who had been so heavily in debt himself, but who was most generously released from all his obligations. In this part of the parable there is exhibited to us—

(1.) A contrast truly appalling. “But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants which owed him an hundred pence : and he laid hands upon him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not : and he went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.” Between a hundred pence and ten thousand talents there is an enormous difference. It was probably designed to show how insignificant are the offences which our fellow-creatures commit against us, when compared with our offences against God. On another occasion we read of “a certain creditor which had two debtors ; the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty.” In their case the sums varied in the proportion of ten to one ; and as the creditor was the same in both instances, this may be taken as a representation of the undoubted truth that some men are much more in debt to God than others. When, however, the comparison is made between what we owe to Him, and what our offending brother owes to us, the difference is shown to be incalculable.

But though the debt was so trifling in the case before us, only some three or four pounds, yet he who had so much forgiven him, as soon as he met his fellow-servant, incredible as it may seem, flew into a fearful rage, seized him by the throat, and cried, “Pay me that thou owest.” Oh the monstrosity of man ! What insolent airs does he often assume, and what fearful tyranny does he often exercise ! How prone is he to

“ Play such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As make the angels weep ! ”

Attacked with such brutal ferocity, the poor creature, trembling, we may easily suppose, through every limb, fell at the feet of his ruthless assailant, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." But he to whom he appealed, and that in the very words which had been so recently employed by himself, refused to listen to his prayer. He who had wept a little while ago was now unmoved by tears, and he who was forgiven, would not forgive.

(2.) A punishment richly deserved. "So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said to him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due to him." Conduct more base than that of which he was guilty cannot be conceived. In him almost every abominable feature was combined—selfishness, cruelty, hard-heartedness, and, above all, the vilest ingratitude. It is no wonder, therefore, that his master's displeasure was kindled to the utmost, when, through some of the other servants, he received intelligence of his behaviour. They, it is said, were very *sorry* when they saw what was done, but the word signifies a mixture of grief and indignation; and such are the feelings with which we should ever regard the ways of evil-doers. The wretched man was instantly summoned into the royal presence; and after being severely reprimanded, he was delivered over to the tormentors, to learn what that meaneth, "He shall have judgment without mercy, that showed no mercy."

But, it may be asked, how could the king, after having once forgiven this servant, hold him again responsible for the debt, and punish him on account of it?

Attempts have been made to solve the difficulty in various ways. Some contend that the debt for which he was now imprisoned was not the original one, but that which he had incurred by his inhuman conduct towards his fellow-servant. He owed him a debt of love, and his lord a debt of gratitude: and for not discharging either of these obligations the present punishment was inflicted. Others suppose that he had only been so far forgiven that he was merely released for the time being, but that the master did not relinquish his right to what was due to him. This, it is argued, is all that had been asked for in the prayer, "Have patience with me;" and the words, "I forgive thee all that debt because thou desiredst me," imply that the favour bestowed corresponded with the request which had been presented. But we cannot say that either of these explanations are satisfactory. We prefer taking the case as it stands, and believe that there was an actual pardon on the one hand, and a subsequent cancelling of the act on the other. What has been previously stated concerning the wife and children being sold will apply here. According to our views and feelings, it was most cruel and unjust, most inhuman and barbarous. So with the grant which the king made, and which he afterwards revoked in his displeasure. It may be contrary to our notions of what is right and honourable: but the despotic rulers of the East, who could do what they pleased, whose power was absolute, and whose will was law, are not to be judged by our standard.

We have, however, this strong consolation, that our heavenly King will never exercise his supreme authority but in accordance with perfect truth and rectitude. He, we are assured, "will not call back his words." Even Balaam was convinced of this, for he asks, "Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" All his gifts and callings are without repentance; and therefore the forgiveness

which is with him is unchangeable and irreversible. This feature of his pardoning mercy is declared in terms the most express, and represented by comparisons and figures the most emphatic. Not only does he blot out the sins of his people, but he covers them, in order that they may be entirely and for ever concealed. Yea, he casts them behind his back ; and, if that is not sufficient, he says that he will bury them in the depths of the sea. Hence “ the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none ; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found.”

Having thus enlarged upon the leading particulars which this parable contains, we have now to notice—

III. THE PRACTICAL LESSON IT ENFORCES.—“ So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” The doom that awaits various classes is clearly stated in the word of truth. It is there announced what will be done to the openly profane, the hypocritical, the impenitent ; but here is set forth the portion of the unforgiving. They will form, it is to be feared, a numerous body on the great day ; but no mercy will then be shown to them, even as they showed no mercy to others. He who knew full well what the principles are that will be acted upon at the last assize, has declared, “ With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged ; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” And when, like the implacable servant before us, they are delivered to the tormentors, none will be found to pity them, but all will feel and all will acknowledge that they have richly deserved their fate.

It is important, however, for us to remember that the forgiveness of our fellow-creatures is not the reason why God forgives us. The petition in the Lord’s prayer is, “ Forgive us our debts, *as* we forgive our debtors,”

not *because* we forgive them. We have already remarked that it was not the design of this parable to show the grounds of forgiveness; nor, it may be further observed, was it intended to show the immediate conditions of forgiveness. The grounds on which God pardons, as we formerly indicated, are the sufferings and death of our blessed Surety, who is set forth to be a propitiation for the remission of sins. What the conditions are, such passages as the following declare in the clearest manner. "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." But while repentance and faith are the divinely prescribed conditions of forgiveness, it is evident at the same time that the unforgiving are not in a state of mind to receive it; and while they are under the influence of such a temper, they have no warrant whatever to expect it. A spirit of forgiveness is either a quality which is found in true repentance and saving faith, or it is one of the many fruits which flow from them, and evidence that they are genuine. The connection between this feeling and forgiveness is somewhat similar, we conceive, to that which existed, according to the account given by James, between the works of Abraham and his justification.

But whatever the precise nature of the relationship may be, it is evident that without the one we shall be destitute of the other; and it is equally evident, that the possession of the one should lead to the cultivation and exercise of the other. If we have obtained mercy,

let us be ready to show mercy. If God has been, and is still, very forbearing towards us, we should strive to imitate his divine example, and thus be followers of him, as dear children. “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice : and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you.”

COUNTING THE COST.

AND THERE WENT GREAT MULTITUDES WITH HIM : AND HE TURNED, AND SAID UNTO THEM, IF ANY MAN COME TO ME AND HATE NOT HIS FATHER, AND MOTHER, AND WIFE, AND CHILDREN, AND BRETHREN, AND SISTERS, YEA, AND HIS OWN LIFE ALSO, HE CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE. AND WHOSOEVER DOTHT NOT BEAR HIS CROSS, AND COME AFTER ME, CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE. FOR WHICH OF YOU, INTENDING TO BUILD A TOWER, SITTETH NOT DOWN FIRST, AND COUNTETH THE COST, WHETHER HE HAVE SUFFICIENT TO FINISH IT? LEST HAPLY, AFTER HE HATH LAID THE FOUNDATION," &c. Luke xiv. 25-33.

WHAT led to the delivery of this discourse was the circumstance mentioned at its commencement, namely, the great multitudes that followed the Saviour. It was a gratifying sight to see the people thronging around him; but he knew full well that pleasing appearances are often deceptive, and hence the strain in which he now proceeded to address them. We have—

I. THE CONDITIONS IMPOSED.—“ If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.” In expounding these words it is evident—

1. That a certain limitation is required. Literally to hate father and mother, brothers and sisters, is contrary to the law of God ; it therefore follows that the language employed is to be understood in a comparative, and not in an absolute sense. The meaning doubtless is, that he should be preferred before the dearest earthly relations, or as it is expressed in Matthew, “ He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me ; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not

worthy of me." Thus if the commands of a parent are opposed to his, the former must be disregarded on account of the latter.

2. The spirit enforced is of universal obligation. "If *any man* come to me, and hate not," &c. It is true that all are not actually exposed to the trial of sacrificing the favour of their friends, and especially of surrendering their lives, for the sake of Christ. But there must be a readiness to abandon everything, should circumstances arise to render it necessary. We are to be martyrs in spirit even if we are never called upon to be martyrs in actual fact.

3. Whatever sacrifices may be demanded of us, the blessedness involved in being true disciples of the Saviour will prove an ample compensation. It was said of Peter, "This is one of them;" but although he denied it at the time, yet to be "one of them" is infinitely preferable to the highest earthly dignity, or the greatest earthly bliss.

II. THE DUTY ENJOINED.—It is that of exercising forethought and calm deliberation, than which nothing is more necessary. Even ordinary prudence requires that we should do nothing rashly; and there are two inducements by which such a course is here recommended.

1. To preserve us from shame and disgrace. "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish." The case supposed is that of a person undertaking to erect a tower without having calculated beforehand what the expense would be. Not having made or procured a correct estimate, his means prove inadequate; and the building is left unfinished, a monument of his folly, and a lesson

to all not to commence what they are incompetent to bring to a conclusion.

2. To secure us from the most terrible disasters. "Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace." For a king or general to go to war with an inadequate force, would be not only an act of folly, but of madness; it would be, in all likelihood, to rush into the jaws of destruction. Hence, before arms are taken up against another power, councils are previously held, and it is felt that a step so serious should not be undertaken before the matter is fully pondered.

III. THE CONSIDERATIONS SUGGESTED.—We see—

1. The faithfulness of Christ. He never deceived any by fair promises and flattering representations. Instead of concealing the difficulties and dangers to which his followers would be exposed, he gave them clearly to understand what they had to expect by becoming identified with him. "They shall put you," was his language, "out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

2. The rationality of religion. It demands that our judgment be exercised, and gives no encouragement to what is merely impulsive, or done at the spur of the moment. "Lord, I will follow thee," said one, "whithersoever thou goest;" but it was a hasty resolution, being prompted only by excited feelings. So when he was told that the Son of man had poorer accommodation than the foxes of the earth and the birds of the air, his enthusiasm at once cooled, and, like many others, he turned away.

3. This subject accounts for the comparatively small

number of the Saviour's followers. When they read the words, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple;" they are disposed to say with the Jews on another occasion, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" They are not prepared to comply with such a requirement; the cost is too great for them.

But, after all, religion has its enjoyments and immunities, as well as its inconveniences and privations. Thus in counting the cost, both sides of the question should be taken into account; there should be a balancing of advantages with disadvantages; and this was the conclusion one came to who was well qualified to speak on the subject: "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

THE BARREN FIG TREE.

A CERTAIN MAN HAD A FIG TREE PLANTED IN HIS VINEYARD ; AND HE CAME AND SOUGHT FRUIT THEREON, AND FOUND NONE. THEN SAID HE UNTO THE DRESSER OF HIS VINEYARD, BEHOLD, THESE THREE YEARS I COME SEEKING FRUIT ON THIS FIG TREE, AND FIND NONE : CUT IT DOWN ; WHY CUMBERETH IT THE GROUND ? AND HE ANSWERING SAID UNTO HIM, LORD, LET IT ALONE THIS YEAR ALSO, TILL I SHALL DIG ABOUT IT, AND DUNG IT ; AND IF IT BEAR FRUIT, WELL ; AND IF NOT, THEN AFTER THAT THOU SHALT CUT IT DOWN.—Luke xiii. 6-9.

TRUTH and error, though so opposite in their nature, are often found intermingled with each other. Of this we have an instance in the preceding verses. That suffering is the result of sin is a truth we are clearly taught in the sacred oracles ; and that such sins as are of a peculiarly aggravated character deserve a corresponding punishment, is equally undoubted. But, on the other hand, to suppose that the greatest sufferers are the greatest sinners is evidently erroneous ; and this was the mistake of those who now came to the Saviour, and spoke to him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. If we attempt to judge of personal character by providential visitations, we shall be likely to judge anything but righteous judgment. As is well observed by the author of Proverbial Philosophy—

“ Judge not of things by their events ; neither of character
by providence ;
And count not a man more evil, because he is unfortunate ;
For the blessings of a better covenant lie not in the sun-
shine of prosperity,
But pain and chastisement do rather show the wise Fa-
ther’s love.”

The work of judging others we should leave to God ;

and while we do so, let us not forget to take home to ourselves the personal and practical duty which our Lord urged upon his hearers, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

The parable that follows is closely connected with what had just been advanced. The Jews who were now present were spared, while the Galileans and those upon whom the tower fell in Siloam, had been suddenly called away. But the fact of their having been thus spared, was no proof that they were less guilty in the sight of God. It was a proof that his long-suffering was greater in their case; but unless the forbearance exercised towards them produced its intended effect, the consequence would be, that ere long they would be visited with similar destruction. They had a longer probation, and their fate rested on its proper improvement. How it should be improved so as to avert the threatened punishment, is shown in the words we have now to consider. They set forth much that is instructive, much that is solemn, much that it becomes us seriously to lay to heart. We shall proceed then to notice, in the first place—

I. THE ADVANTAGES ENJOYED.—"A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard." A vineyard, with which the Jews were so familiar, and which is so often used to represent the privileges they enjoyed, suggests the following particulars.

1. It was separated from the adjoining land. And how strikingly does this set forth the condition of God's ancient people. Between them and all the nations of the earth a line of demarcation was drawn; they were chosen to be the peculiar heritage of the Most High, and favoured as such far above every other portion of the human family. It was not owing to anything in themselves that they were thus selected, a truth of which it was necessary again and again to remind them. "For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy

God : the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people ; for ye were the fewest of all people : but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt." Now what Israel was of old, we are in a manner scarcely less special at present. Did God put a difference between them and Egypt, Tyre, Assyria, and the rest of the ancient world ? Just so it is with us in reference to all the kingdoms into which the earth is now divided. The consideration of this should excite our warmest gratitude ; but, at the same time, the solemn responsibility it involves may well fill us with trembling apprehension ; for where much is given, much will undoubtedly be required.

2. It was protected by walls or fences. The land of Canaan as regards its natural position was difficult of invasion ; but over and above this, it was defended by the faithfulness, and mighty power, and providential interpositions of God. And had the Jews kept his covenant, and observed the statutes he had given them, they would have been able to bid defiance to all their adversaries, and say, " The Lord of hosts is with us ; the God of Jacob is our refuge." That this equally applies to us is sufficiently evident. Independent of the insular situation of our country, we have, age after age, been preserved by an almighty arm from the hostility of innumerable foes. Often has the prayer been offered—

" Amidst our isle, exalted high,
Do thou our glory stand ;
And, like a wall of guardian fire,
Surround the favour'd land."

Hitherto this prayer has been heard; and hence no serious calamity has befallen us, and certainly no adversaries have been able to subdue us. God has had his vineyard in our midst, and this is the reason why he hath not dealt so with any other nation, those only excepted who, like ourselves, have been made the depositories of his own truth.

3. It was cultivated with much care and labour. Whatever the original quality of the soil might be, the tilling it received made it rich and fruitful. In Isaiah we read concerning the vineyard of red wine, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment:" words in which both features are combined; that of secure protection on the one hand, and constant care and culture on the other. Now with the strictest truth it can be said that our lines, like those of the Psalmist, have fallen in pleasant places, even as in a fertile and well-watered garden. Not in the wild wastes of heathenism has our lot been cast, but in a region highly favourable for the production and development of piety. Every facility do we enjoy for bringing forth fruit in abundance to the praise and glory of God. This leads us to the next division of our subject, namely—

II. THE RETURNS EXPECTED.—To look for fruit was natural, inasmuch as that was the exclusive object for which the vineyard was prepared, and for which the fig tree was planted. Therefore since we have been placed in such favourable circumstances, it will be necessary to inquire more particularly what are the fruits we should render in return for the great things which have been done for us.

1. The fruits of penitence. Our Lord had just been saying to the people, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." A more fearful denunciation it is impossible to conceive. The word perish is easily pronounced, but only lost souls can comprehend its meaning, and they are ever discovering in it some new mystery of

torment. That the doom of all who live and die impenitent, will be everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, is a truth as clear and undoubted, as it is solemn and appalling.

But what is repentance? No better definition can be given than that of an old writer, who describes it as “a heart broken *for* sin, and a heart broken *from* sin.” For an *illustration* of it, we are not aware that anything more striking can be referred to than the experience of David as recorded in the 51st Psalm. In the state of mind which is there disclosed—the godly sorrow, the deep self-abasement, the ingenuous confessions, the earnest cries for mercy, the intense longing after a clean heart and a renewed spirit—we have the leading elements of that repentance which is unto life, the repentance which God requires from sinful men, the repentance over which the angelic hosts rejoice.

2. The fruits of personal holiness. The great design of the gospel, of its truths, its ordinances, its many precious privileges, is to make us holy. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” For the absence of these practical fruits nothing will be accepted as a compensation; no leaves, no blossoms, no profession however blazing, no gifts however imposing. Thus we find the apostle, in his letters to the various churches, expressing his ardent desire that they would bring forth fruit; fruit to show that his labours had not been in vain on the one hand, and fruit that might abound to their own account on the other. But what kind of fruit was he so anxious for them to produce? To be able to speak with the tongues of men and of angels he lightly esteemed; he regarded it merely as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Something higher than intellectual acquirements, and higher than miraculous gifts, was the object of his strenuous

efforts, and of his fervent prayers. He felt that the end of his ministry was only answered in proportion as he could say, "For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness: but now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

3. The fruits of Christian activity. God blesses his people in order that they might be made a blessing to others. He would not have us neglect our own spiritual well-being: but if all our concern is centred in ourselves, we have great reason to suspect the genuineness of our piety. Many such are to be found connected with all our churches. They are in the vineyard, but they do not work there; they regard it simply as a place of ease and enjoyment, and not as a sphere of hard and self-denying labour. There is, indeed, nothing that some persons more dislike than the religion of doing. The religion of sound creeds, the religion of ritual observances, the religion of delightful frames and feelings, they admire and applaud; but the religion of doing they cannot away with. And, consequently, the preaching in which it is much insisted upon, is by no means palatable to them; it is like "the sound of the trumpet, and the voice of words, which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more." Ministers of this class, according to their phraseology, are mere legalists, and what they preach is not the gospel. Strange too! Not the gospel—when in one of the first sermons which our Lord delivered, he appealed to his disciples, and asked them, "What *do* ye more than others?" Not the gospel—when on a subsequent occasion he made the emphatic declaration, that they were his spiritual brethren, and they alone, "who hear the word of God, and *do* it!" Not the gospel—and yet to be assured by its divine Author, that the piety which will be owned and honoured on the great day, is not the cold and lifeless orthodoxy of such as say,

“Lord, Lord;” but the practical diligence of those “who *do* the will of their Father who is in heaven!” Not the gospel—while its invariable effect, when it comes home with power to the sinner’s heart, is to lead him to inquire, with the awakened persecutor of old, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to *do*?” an inquiry which he continues to make as long as he lives! Nothing can be more evident than that we have altogether mistaken the nature of the gospel, and that we have never submitted to its claims, unless it has inspired us with a spirit of activity and devotedness. The fruitful Christian is one who is up and doing; he is equally anxious to get good, and to do good. May such be our character! Let us seek to embody, in our whole course and conduct, the apostle’s injunction, “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” Thus established in every good word and work, we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our God and Saviour.

III. THE DISAPPOINTMENT FELT.—“And he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.” How often is this the case as regards the expectations of Him, who looketh down from his high and holy habitation upon the children of men! What is the sight presented to his all-searching eye? Are his rebellious subjects found humbled at his footstool in the profoundest depths of contrition and self-abasement? We are furnished with a reply in his own affecting words: “I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.” Did he look for purity? This is what he found: “They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” And as to service rendered to the glory of his great and adorable name, he had to utter the mournful

complaint, "Israel is an empty vine; he bringeth forth fruit unto himself." While the heathen in their blindness were full of zeal in worshipping and serving their abominable idols, those whom Jehovah had formed for himself to show forth his praise, only served him with their sins, and wearied him with their multiplied transgressions. But what is here declared suggests the following particulars.

1. The disappointment was great. A scanty supply would have been mortifying, but instead of that, there was no fruit at all. This tree resembled the one of which we read at a later period of our Saviour's history. On his way from Bethany to Jerusalem he felt hungry, and seeing a fig tree he went up to it, if haply he might find anything thereon; but, we are told, "when he came to it, he found *nothing but leaves*." Very probably there were leaves in abundance, broad-spreading and luxuriant, in the case before us; there was, however, nothing else: and in the absence of something more substantial, the richest foliage was a poor compensation.

2. Besides the absence of fruit, there was also positive injury. The barren fig tree cumbered the ground; it occupied the room where another might have stood; it drew the strength of the soil to itself; and it kept the beams of the sun from others. This is an important consideration, and deserves to be seriously pondered. There are many who flatter themselves with the thought that if they are doing no good, they cannot be charged with doing any evil. This, however, is a mistake. Some kind of influence we all exert continually, and if it be not beneficial it must be pernicious. It may not be apparent at the time, but still it cannot fail to produce an effect upon those with whom we come in contact. Every unprofitable tree in God's vineyard, every barren and lukewarm professor in the church of Christ, diffuses a withering influence all

around : an influence that chills the souls of believers, and causes their hands to hang down ; an influence that emboldens the scoffer, that encourages the profligate, and seals the eyes of the impenitent in death-like slumber.

3. It involved a serious loss. Fig trees were of a generous and prolific nature, and their produce formed in the East an important article of food, and not of mere luxury, as it is with us. Hence the husbandmen there lived, to a considerable extent, upon what they yielded, in common with the vines and other plants ; so that it was no trifling matter when the expected fruit was not forthcoming, whether from blight, or barrenness, or any other cause. Thus we find that the prophet, when describing the losses to which the Jews were subject, commences by saying, " Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ;" which shows that such a failure was regarded as no common calamity.

In one sense God is altogether unaffected by our barrenness or fruitfulness, by our rebellion against his authority, or obedience to his commands. " Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself ? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous ? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect ? Will he reprove thee for fear of thee ? will he enter with thee into judgment ? Look unto the heavens, and see ; and behold the clouds, which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him ? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto him ? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him ? or what receiveth he of thine hand ? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art ; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man." To endeavour to add to the splendour of the noontide sun by kindling a number of torches, or attempt to damage that glorious orb by shooting arrows against

it, would be less preposterous than for us to suppose that our purest services can add one iota to the essential glory of the Most High, or that our most flagrant offences can interfere in the least with his ineffable blessedness. Ten thousand worlds may perish, but the shock would be unfelt by him. Before he called them into existence, he was infinitely happy in his own boundless self-sufficiency ; and when, at the final conflagration, they shall be consumed with the spirit of his mouth, and be destroyed by the brightness of his coming, his glory and felicity will remain undiminished and undisturbed.

On the other hand, there is such a thing as robbing God, defrauding him of his due, withholding from him the homage, the obedience, the service, which we are under the highest obligations to render to him as our Creator and Preserver. "Through breaking the law," the apostle asks, "dishonourest thou God?" a question that contains its own answer. But while it is in our power to dishonour his sacred name, it is also possible for us to reverence and magnify Him, who is exalted above all blessing and praise. "Herein," says our Lord, "is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit ; so shall ye be my disciples." While therefore the owner of the vineyard suffered a serious loss by the barrenness of the fig tree, so through our unfruitfulness we defraud the great Proprietor of the universe of that revenue of glory which he claims from his creatures, in return for all that he has done for them.

IV. THE DOOM DENOUNCED.—"Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none : cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ?" Three years was a long time to wait, and the result being the same one season after another, the case became at length altogether hopeless. It is most likely that the period specified was only introduced in order to harmonize with the

machinery of the parable. But some have thought that there is reference to the three dispensations, the patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian; others think, with greater probability, that the three years of our Saviour's ministry are more especially intended. Great indeed were the privileges which the Jewish people then enjoyed: but how were such signal advantages improved by them? What national repentance or reformation do we read of? What number of converts do we find among the crowds that saw his mighty works, and heard his wondrous words? Year after year rolled away, but the vast bulk of that generation continued impenitent and unbelieving; and now his matchless career was drawing to a close, so that he began to speak more of coming judgments, and give clear intimations of their inevitable destruction, if they persisted in opposing his character and claims. Concerning this doom three remarks may be made.

1. It is severe. Under the former dispensations the severity of God was manifested in a very conspicuous manner. It seems that mankind, in the earlier ages of the world, especially needed to have the solemn truth impressed upon their minds that the Most High was not to be trifled with, and that his displeasure could not be incurred with impunity. On one occasion he said, through his servant Jeremiah, "Go to Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." In similar language he addresses us; he would have us repair to many a solemn scene in order to witness the terrible things he has done, that he might thus be known by the judgments he has executed. He says, Go to Sodom and the other cities of the plain, and see what I did there; how I rained upon them fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest, as the awful portion of their cup. Go to the old world, and see what I did there: how I destroyed all flesh, with only one family excepted, and buried them

for their abounding iniquities in a watery grave. So with the Canaanites, and the hosts of Assyria, and many others, who by the power of his avenging wrath were utterly consumed. Under the gospel, it is true, the more gracious and attractive features of his character appear with greater prominence; but if on that account we imagine that we have nothing to fear from his threatenings, we shall be sadly disappointed. What says the apostle? "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire." These words are often understood as signifying that God out of Christ is a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity. That is an important truth, but it is evidently not what this passage declares. The meaning seems to be that the God of the gospel is the same as the God of the law; his character has undergone no change; he is still a jealous, a sin-hating and sin-avenging Being. Reverence, therefore, and godly fear, become us, and not daring presumption or unhallowed familiarity. Without such a spirit, to serve him acceptably is impossible; "for our God"—he with whom we have now to do—"is a consuming fire;" and all his adversaries will find that as such he will go through them, and burn them together.

Thus the sentence, "Cut it down," is one that should make the sinner tremble. It shows that the wonderful forbearance which had borne with him so long has reached its limits, and that now the extreme penalty is about to be carried into execution. "He that being often reprov'd, and hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

2. It is just. "Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? God forbid; for then how shall God judge the world?" In all the terrible visitations to which we have just referred; in the unparalleled woes which came

upon the Jewish nation ; in the indignation and wrath, the tribulation and anguish which will be inflicted upon every soul of man that doeth evil ; in each case we can say, " Righteous art thou, O Lord ; righteous in all thy ways, and holy in all thy works." " Though," as one observes, " he were to destroy all the human family, ourselves included, for ever and ever, and make the sole manifestation of his glory the flames of an eternal hell, yet will we cry, as we go away into everlasting punishment, Shall not the judge of all the earth do right ?" Such a feeling it becomes each of us to cherish. Every truly humbled sinner, like the royal penitent of old, knows something of it. While acknowledging, with shame and confusion of face, his numerous and aggravated offences, he does not find it difficult to add, " That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." Whoever, in his pride and self-complacency, may spurn the sentiment with disdain, he can truly say,

" My lips with shame my sins confess,
Against thy law, against thy grace :
Lord, should thy judgment grow severe,
I am condemn'd, but thou art clear.

Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
I must pronounce thee just in death ;
And if my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well."

3. It is decisive. At least it looks as if it were so. " Cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ?" The words are uttered in an authoritative and determined tone, and indicate that the mind of the owner was fully made up. He had waited long ; he had, no doubt, hesitated long ; but now it would appear that the matter is finally settled, and the worthless object is to occupy its accustomed place no longer. Such being the case, we expect to see the axe brought out, and we listen for the first stroke to be given. But stay ; before the

sharp instrument appears, the dresser of the vineyard has a word to say, and that an earnestly imploring word. Instead, therefore, of witnessing the execution of the sentence which had been pronounced, we have to hear—

V. THE PRAYER OFFERED.—“And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.”

1. By whom it was presented. Our Lord himself is doubtless the person intended. He is the great vine-dresser, and the entire management of all that relates to the interests of the church is intrusted to his care. Besides, it was to the dresser of the vineyard that the command to cut down the tree was addressed; and we are left in no doubt as to whom that solemn function belongs. “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son. As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.” We have therefore a representation here of our gracious mediator and advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous; he who pleaded for his murderers, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do;” he who ever lives to make intercession for transgressors. Oh! how often, when the language of divine justice, like that of the king of Israel to the prophet Elisha, has been, “Shall I smite them? shall I smite them?” has he stepped forward and interposed between the uplifted axe and the barren tree, and thus prevented the blow which, if it had fallen, would have consigned the impenitent to endless perdition!

2. The narrow limits it embraces. The prayer, it will be observed, was not for the reversal of the sentence, but for its suspension; and the period assigned is merely another year. What is asked, therefore, is

only a conditional favour. Let the sinner think of this. The solemn words, "Cut it down," have not been recalled; the threatened doom is still hanging like a dark cloud over him; but a short respite is granted in order to give him one more trial.

3. The ground on which it is urged. It is the possibility, that if further means were employed, the result may even yet be different. "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it." If I loosen the soil around the roots, and mix with it fresh manure, and spare no effort that anxious care and long experience can suggest; peradventure—who can tell? it may become a fruitful tree after all. So with our thoughtless hearers, who have long cared for none of the things which belong to their present peace and everlasting welfare. "It may be they will consider;" it may be they will repent of their wickedness, and forsake their foolish ways, and turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart. Therefore let one method after another be tried; powerful arguments, arousing exhortations, kind entreaties, faithful appeals, solemn threatenings; nothing should on any account be left unattempted.

"And if it bear fruit, well;" well in all respects, and in a three-fold sense especially.

(1.) We shall thereby answer the great end of our existence. Unless we produce the fruits of holy obedience, and devote ourselves to the divine praise and glory, we transgress the great law of our creation; as much so as if the sun refused to shine, the earth to bring forth her treasures, the flowers to diffuse their fragrance, and the trees to yield their fruit.

(2.) Our own happiness and well-being will thus, in the largest measure, be promoted. As Moses declared to the Jews, "Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: thou shalt therefore keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee this day,

that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee." Indeed we often find the Most High, when pleading with his ancient people, and urging them to observe his laws, enforcing such appeals, not so much on the ground of his own authority, but because of the benefits which would accrue to themselves in consequence. And when they broke his statutes, and walked not in his ways, at times he lays greater stress upon the consideration that they had acted in opposition to their own happiness, rather than their having dishonoured his name, and set his claims at defiance. "O that thou hadst hearkened unto my commandments!"—then I should have been glorified and highly exalted? no; "then had *thy* peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea."

(3.) We shall evidence that we are the children of God, and heirs of eternal felicity. "By their fruits ye shall know them," was the rule which our Saviour laid down; and the beloved disciple assures us that, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

But while it is said, "If it bear fruit, well;" it is also added, "and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." He who had interceded so earnestly, so tenderly, here expresses his full acquiescence in the infliction of the doom denounced, if after the lapse of another season, no favourable change would appear. It is a solemn but undoubted truth, that impenitent sinners when they shall at length be dealt with according to their deserts, will perish unpitied, not only by the righteous Judge, but by the compassionate Saviour. Insulted mercy will join with offended justice in demanding their condemnation.

We shall conclude with a short extract from an American writer, which, in a striking and affecting manner, illustrates the leading features of the present parable. He says, "I once occupied a room, looking out

on a garden beautifully arranged. When the winter had passed, I watched with intense interest the effect of returning spring on the trees and plants. One tree remained brown and leafless, while all around it were putting on their beautiful robes. One day the gardener came to this tree, and looked at it with an expression of sympathy. He seemed to wish to help it to put forth foliage. His visits were repeated several times ; new care was bestowed upon it ; frequent tests were applied to ascertain whether it still lived. Days passed ; and it was only becoming more hideous, as its companions grew more beautiful. My own sympathy for it sensibly declined with my hope for its recovery ; it was becoming so manifest that it cumbered the ground. At length I observed the gardener come and give it one more earnest inspection. He shook his head as if hope had died in his heart, and his lips pronounced its doom. Soon he returned with his axe. Every blow upon it excited my sympathy, but satisfied my judgment. And when he cut it down, dragged it out, and cast it on the fire, I said, It is right : but it is awfully symbolical of the doom of Christless men."

THE TRUE VINE.

I AM THE TRUE VINE, AND MY FATHER IS THE HUSBANDMAN. EVERY BRANCH IN ME THAT BEARETH NOT FRUIT HE TAKETH AWAY; AND EVERY BRANCH THAT BEARETH FRUIT, HE PURGETH IT, THAT IT MAY BRING FORTH MORE FRUIT. NOW YE ARE CLEAN THROUGH THE WORD THAT I HAVE SPOKEN UNTO YOU. ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU. AS THE BRANCH CANNOT BEAR FRUIT OF ITSELF, EXCEPT IT ABIDE IN THE VINE, &c.—John xv. 1-8.

It would appear that these words were spoken by our blessed Lord on the way to Gethsemane. What is recorded in the former chapter was delivered in the upper room, around the paschal table; but the concluding words, “Arise, let us go hence,” indicate that the little band were now either directing their steps towards the garden, or had already arrived there. In the portion of this touching discourse which is contained in the verses before us, we have—

I. A BEAUTIFUL SIMILITUDE.—“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” Innumerable comparisons are employed to set forth the Saviour, and that which he here uses is exceedingly appropriate. The Jews regarded the vine as the most valuable of plants, and looked upon it as a type of all that was excellent and desirable. When Jesus, therefore, compares himself to such an object, he claims for himself no small importance; and well would it have been if his countrymen, who prized the vine so highly, had been brought to esteem him in a manner commensurate with his matchless worth.

But while he calls himself the true vine, he says that his Father is the husbandman, or vine-dresser. This is intended to show the care he has for, and the deep interest he takes in, the welfare of his people.

II. A NEEDFUL PROCESS.—“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.” A two-fold operation is here referred to; the fruitless branches are cut off, and the fruitful are pruned, in order to make them still more fruitful. The gardener well knows the value of the pruning-knife, and it is often with no sparing hand that he has to use it. Those luxuriant sprouts, which look so beautiful, consume the vegetable moisture which the other branches require; and it is only by pruning them away that a healthy vigour is imparted to the entire circulation. So the heavenly Husbandman deals with his people. In itself the act may be painful, and may even appear to be severe, but in its effects it is most salutary. The flow of their inclinations and affections is thereby diverted; instead of being left to run hither and thither, downward and sideward, they are drawn upwards towards himself.

III. A CONSOLING ASSURANCE.—“Now ye are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you.” The word of Christ is the great instrument in the sanctification of his people. In the following chapter he prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.” “Christ loved the church,” says the apostle, “and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.” “Thy word is very pure,” was the language of the Psalmist; and whenever it is received in the love of it, a transforming influence is exerted, and those in whom it dwells are made holy even as it is holy.

IV. AN IMPORTANT INJUNCTION.—“Abide in me, and I in you.” Unless we do so—

1. Spiritual fruitfulness will be impossible. “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I

in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ; for without me ye can do nothing."

2. In no other way can we be preserved from destruction. " If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered ; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

3. Those who cleave stedfastly to Christ will have their utmost wishes gratified. " If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

4. God will be thereby honoured, and the Saviour's approbation will be secured. " Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit : so shall ye be my disciples."

THE GOSPEL SUPPER.

A CERTAIN MAN MADE A GREAT SUPPER, AND BADE MANY : AND SENT HIS SERVANTS AT SUPPER TIME TO SAY TO THEM THAT WERE BIDDEN, COME ; FOR ALL THINGS ARE NOW READY. AND THEY ALL WITH ONE CONSENT BEGAN TO MAKE EXCUSE. THE FIRST SAID UNTO HIM, I HAVE BOUGHT A PIECE OF GROUND, AND I MUST NEEDS GO AND SEE IT : I PRAY THEE HAVE ME EXCUSED. AND ANOTHER SAID, I HAVE BOUGHT FIVE YOKE OF OXEN, AND I GO TO PROVE THEM : I PRAY THEE HAVE ME EXCUSED. AND ANOTHER SAID, I HAVE MARRIED A WIFE, AND THEREFORE I CANNOT COME. SO THAT SERVANT CAME AND SHEWED HIS LORD THESE THINGS, &c.—Luke xiv. 16-24.

SOME interesting volumes have been published under the title of "Table-Talk." That of Luther is well known, in which many striking sayings of the great reformer are preserved, which would otherwise have sunk into oblivion. To other works of a biographical character, the above designation might have been appropriately given, especially Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. We need not say that its chief charm, the one feature in which it sinterest and value pre-eminently consists, is not the incidents it contains, but the conversational observations which are recorded.

The table-talk, however, of Luther and Johnson, instructive and important as it was, is not for a moment to be compared with that to which we are permitted to listen on the present occasion. We have in this chapter, as well as in many other parts of the gospel narratives, the table-talk of Christ. And while in his more public addresses, "never man spake like this man," the same can be said of him with equal truth concerning all he uttered in those social gatherings to which, from various motives, he was occasionally invited.

He was now in the house of one of the chief Phari-

sees, and it was while sitting at the board of his host, that the words before us were delivered. He had just before directed the attention of those who were present to the importance of humility; a lesson, it seems, that they much needed, from the manner in which they thrust themselves forward to take possession of the highest and most honourable seats. After this he proceeded to teach the duty of disinterested benevolence; and here he addressed himself not to his fellow-guests, but to the person who had prepared the entertainment. "Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." These words, especially in the reference with which they conclude to the rewards of a future state, led one of the company to exclaim, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." To that remark our Saviour replied by uttering this well-known parable, in which he shows that those who will not enjoy that distinguished privilege will have only themselves to blame. But to proceed with our exposition, we commence by observing that for our wretched and perishing race there is—

I. A RICH BANQUET PROVIDED.—"Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many." The provision that God has made in the gospel for our spiritual exigencies is here evidently intended. In many other places it is set forth under the same similitude; but on all occasions it is shown to be a feast of no ordinary character. This supper may be called a great one on various accounts. It is so because—

1. It is intended for a large number of guests. The

expression of the apostle, in which he speaks of "a remnant being saved," has often been sadly misapplied. Certain narrow-minded religionists are accustomed to adduce it in support of the opinion that the heirs of salvation will be only an insignificant fraction of the human family. It is quite evident, however, that Paul is there speaking of the Jews exclusively. The great mass of his countrymen rejected the Saviour; but with the whole of them that was not the case. Though doomed as a nation to destruction on account of their unbelief, yet a remnant was saved even of them. That the entire family of the redeemed will consist of numbers without number, is as clear as it is a most glorious and cheering truth. The Lord Jesus is to see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied: but that the salvation of a mere remnant will satisfy him, is not for a moment to be supposed. A great multitude will they undoubtedly be at last; but however great, there will be a sufficient supply for them all.

2. On account of the sumptuousness of its provisions. "And in this mountain," says the prophet, "shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." But no similitude can adequately represent those rich blessings that are set before us in the gospel. The salvation which is in Christ Jesus embraces all that is great and glorious, all that can satisfy the boundless cravings of our nature, and fill us with unutterable joy. Here is pardon for our numberless offences; grace that reaches to the utmost extent of our unworthiness; adoption into the heavenly family; conformity to the divine image; peace for the troubled conscience; a hope that maketh not ashamed: and all this, with much besides that might be specified, as introductory to the provisions of a higher economy, where there is reserved what the eye has never seen, what the ear has never heard, and what the mind, in its loftiest conceptions, has never imagined.

3. The great expense incurred in preparing it. Never was there so costly a banquet as this. While we can come to the feast of fat things without money and without price, yet to procure it the expenditure was so vast, the outlay of divine wealth so amazing, as to fill principalities and powers with adoring wonder. To accomplish our salvation, the eternal Son of God became incarnate; the infinite perfections of Deity were mysteriously allied to all the wants and weaknesses of humanity; the raptures and felicities of heaven were exchanged for the privations and sorrows of earth; the crown of glory was laid aside, and the everlasting throne forsaken, in order that the King of kings might wear a wreath of thorns, and the Prince of life be suspended in shame and agony on the accursed tree. Well may the poet say,

“The ransom was paid down; the fund of heaven,
Heaven’s inexhaustible, exhausted fund,
Amazing, and amazed, pour’d forth the price,
All price beyond: though curious to compute,
Archangels failed to cast the mighty sum.”

These considerations are sufficient to justify the application of the word “great” to the spiritual banquet of which this parable speaks. We therefore go on to remark that we have, in the next place,

II. AN URGENT INVITATION TO COME AND PARTAKE OF ITS AMPLE AND DELICIOUS STORES.—“A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and sent his servant at supper-time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.” Stier observes, “What boundless matter is there in the *all things* which are here said to be made ready.” The words do contain boundless matter indeed, and it is as important as it is boundless. For many ages had the preparations been going on, but at length they are all completed. The Redeemer has assumed our nature; he has fulfilled every requirement, and accomplished the work which

was given him to do ; he has offered himself as a sacrifice to God of a sweet-smelling savour ; he has finished transgression, made an end of sin, and obtained eternal redemption. The curse is cancelled, the great adversary is vanquished, and the power of hell is destroyed. Having become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, the Lord Jesus is exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high ; he has entered into the holiest, and sprinkled the mercy seat with his own blood ; all power and authority are committed into his hands, and with him the Spirit's influences, in inexhaustible plenitude, are deposited. Yes, all things are ready ; every needful blessing is ready to be communicated : pardon is ready, for the blood has been shed, without which there could be no remission ; peace is ready, for the legacy in which it was bequeathed has been proved and ratified. And while the richest gifts are ready to be bestowed, the appointed channels are also ready for their conveyance. Not only is the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, but the pipes are laid to carry the living streams in all directions ; the means of grace are instituted, the word of reconciliation is proclaimed, and the invitation is echoed and re-echoed, " Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters ; and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy and eat, yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price." " The Spirit and the bride say, Come ; and let him that heareth say, Come ; and let him that is athirst come ; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

But there is another side to this subject, and when both are taken in, an important and painful qualification must be introduced. All things are ready, with one exception, and that is to be found in man's reluctant and rebellious heart. Sinners are not willing to be saved, and it is their want of will that will be the sole cause of their destruction. The strange question has been discussed before now in connection with what is

called the disinterested love of God, as to whether we ought to be prepared to become the victims of endless perdition, if the suffering of such a doom should be for the manifestation of the divine glory. Happily there is no danger of such a test being ever proposed, and those who have exercised their ingenuity in discussing the point have only darkened counsel by words without knowledge; yea, they have spoken most unadvisedly, understanding neither what they said, nor whereof they affirmed. God does not ask whether we are willing to be lost, but rather whether we are willing to be saved; and in his word it is clearly shown that nothing so much redounds to the glory, not only of his grace, but of all his adorable perfections, as our acceptance of his offered mercy. Are we thus prepared to glorify him? His inviting voice is now addressing us; are we willing to comply with the call? Or must it still be said that, though all things are ready as to the providing and free offering of the blessings of salvation, yet that we are not ready to avail ourselves of them.

With those whom this parable describes it was even so. "Come; for all things are now ready," was the invitation sent to them; but how was it responded to? In the statements which follow we have an answer to the question. Let us then proceed to notice—

III. THE DISCOURAGING RECEPTION WHICH THE SERVANT RECEIVED.—"And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." Concerning these excuses we may observe—

1. The unanimity with which they were made. It was "with one consent," or, more literally, "out of one mind." To be of the same mind is what we are often

exhorted to, as when the apostle says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." But while there is such a thing as being joined together in the same mind and the same judgment, that is most desirable; there is also an unanimity which is much to be deplored. Nothing is more important than to see eye to eye, to join hand in hand, and respond heart to heart, in reference to some worthy object; but it is truly sad when persons are of one accord, either in sentiment, or feeling, or action, as regards aught that is evil. Such, however, was the case with those who are here spoken of. "Discordant consent," as one remarks, "that contradicts the designs of mercy! Horrible harmony of men, that quarrels with the love of God! Infernal unanimity, when the jarring elements of the chaos of hell coalesce to oppose the grace of heaven!" But so it often is; and those who agree in nothing else, unite in despising Christ, in rejecting his salvation, and thereby in ruining their own souls.

2. They were frivolous in the extreme. "Bring forth your strong reasons," was the language addressed to certain idolaters of old. So important were the interests involved, and so great was the guilt contracted, in transferring the homage due to the only living and true God, to any other being or object, that it would be the highest infatuation to do so, unless valid grounds could be urged to justify such a course. If the claims of the God of Israel were doubtful, they are called upon to prove that the claims of their own deities are superior, which, of course, it was impossible for them to do. But it is not a less serious matter to slight the provisions of infinite love and mercy, and set our affections upon the perishable things of time and sense, than it was for them to withhold from the Divine Being the worship he required, and

place their trust in graven images. To the one class therefore as well as the other the demand, "Bring forth your strong reasons," is eminently appropriate, and highly necessary.

In the case before us, however, the reasons are not strong, but exceedingly weak and worthless. "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it." How empty an excuse was this! If he had bought it, was it not his own? and, being his own, there was no danger of losing it. The land would be there on the morrow, and why not delay seeing it until then? So with the second, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them:" a plea of precisely the same character, and equally absurd as the former. The third said, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." If he had been urged to go to battle this would, according to the Jewish law, have been a valid reason for refusing; the kind and considerate enactment being, "When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, but he shall be free at home one year." But to adduce it as a ground for declining to attend a banquet is quite ridiculous. Now these instances were doubtless intended to show that the various excuses under which sinners seek to shelter themselves, and justify their neglect and rejection of the gracious offers of the gospel, far from being weighty, as they should be in a matter so important, are altogether vain and trifling.

3. They were evidently feigned and evasive. God is sincere in his invitations; we may be quite certain that he means what he says. This may be inferred, not only from his love and compassion, not only from his truth and faithfulness, but also from the displeasure he manifests when his offers are not accepted. If a person out of ordinary civility, and as a mere matter of form, invited another to partake of his hospitality, the refusal would cause no regret; but, on the other hand, if much

displeasure was felt and great offence was taken, it would plainly indicate that he had been prompted by something more than common courtesy. Now in God being angry, as we are told he is, when men do not avail themselves of his proffered kindness, we have a clear proof of the sincerity with which he invited them; it shows that he does not say one thing, and intend another. But nothing can be more clear than that the reasons here adduced do not express what was really felt. They bear unmistakable marks of falsehood, and are only used as a disguise to conceal the disinclination which these individuals did not like openly to avow. So with sinners in all ages. They have no wish to respond to the heavenly call; and what they say when the matter is urged upon them is mere pretence, and not real and honest reasons.

4. They were all derived from things which, in themselves, were not unlawful. In the possession of property, in business transactions, in the enjoyments of domestic life, there is certainly nothing wrong; but however innocent they may be, and whatever claims they may have upon us in their proper place, yet if they interfere with, and are allowed to draw our attention from, other and far higher objects, then they become sinful and dangerous. Thus, while many perish by indulging in what is openly and grossly vicious, by flagrant violations of God's law, and a daring defiance of his high authority; yet more perish by things which no law forbids, things which might justly and laudably have been done, if, for their sake, things still more needful had not been left undone. In this consideration there is much that is solemn and admonitory; and as the whole of the excuses which are here mentioned had reference to the ordinary concerns and engagements of life, let us be on our guard, lest the same causes should, in our case, lead to the same results.

IV. THE MESSENGER'S RETURN TO HIS MASTER, AND THE EFFECTS WHICH HIS REPORT PRODUCED.—“So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.” Several particulars are here set forth.

1. His lord's displeasure was kindled. That such would be the case was to be expected, for his kindness had been spurned, and the flimsy pretexts that were made could only be regarded as highly insulting. Now if we reject the offers of salvation, it is certain that by such conduct we provoke the anger of the Most High. He will not allow his overtures to be slighted with impunity, overtures prompted by unbounded compassion, and which display such matchless condescension. For this, the greatest of all sins, is reserved the sorest of all punishments. Nothing is so much to be dreaded as abused love, just as nothing burns so fiercely as oil, though one of the softest of substances.

2. The determination that a different class should be invited was declared. By the former, persons of respectable standing in society are intended. Among the Jews but few of such embraced the Saviour, for we find the question asked, “Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But this people,” it was added, “who know not the law are cursed:” words which refer to the ignorant masses of the community, who were regarded with contempt by the proud religionists of the day. Such were the characters embraced in the commission which the servant now received.

“Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.”

It is a blessed truth that the lowest and most degraded are welcome to the banquet of mercy. To the poor the gospel was preached by the great Teacher: he did not look upon them as accursed: but, commiserating their destitution, he came to bless them, by enlightening their darkness, soothing their sorrows, and turning them from their sins. And the mind that was in him, was also in those whom he sent forth to proclaim the glad tidings to every creature. “Give us,” said Voltaire, in one of his letters to the infidel Frederick of Prussia—“give us the princes and philosophers, and we will leave the lower classes to the fishermen and tent-makers.” Happily there have been fishermen and tent-makers sufficiently inspired with the spirit of their Master to take the legacy; and hence the sons and daughters of poverty have in all ages been made rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him. Thus the ancient prediction has been verified, “For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper: he shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy.”

3. The results which attended the step that was now taken. “And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.” This shows that not a few were gathered in: for though some, yea many, refuse God’s gracious provisions, yet such is not the case with all. It would appear that these forlorn and afflicted creatures, feeling their need, gladly availed themselves of the divine bounty; and so the hungry were filled with good things, while the others, contented with their earthly portion, remained unblessed and unsaved. But though a goodly number were prevailed upon to come to the feast, there was, in consequence of

the extensive scale on which the arrangements had been conducted, ample space left for additional guests. The time may come when our Father's house with its many mansions will be so crowded that it can hold no more, every place being filled, every seat occupied. As yet, however, it is not so; if it were, with us it would be sad indeed. But after all the countless throngs which have been admitted through the pearly gates, the voice still proclaims, "And yet there is room."

4. Encouraged by the success already met with, another commission is issued, and that in terms more pressing than any of the former ones. The servant was to go out into the highways and hedges, and he was to compel all he met with to come in. The wanderers, by whom such places were frequented, would especially require to be thus urged. The difficulty in their case would be to convince them that the invitation was really intended for such characters, and to remove the feeling which would be likely to rise in their minds that they were altogether unworthy to appear at so grand an entertainment. For such reasons, it would be difficult to persuade them; but the servant was commanded to leave no means untried; with all earnestness and importunity, yea, with something almost like force he was to constrain them, and on no account to take any denial. For this compulsion two reasons are given.

(1.) That of securing the full complement of guests. "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, *that my house may be filled.*" "Nature," it has been often said, "abhors a vacuum;" and what is true of nature is as true of grace, and also of glory. Let us therefore comply with the invitation ourselves, and then exert all our ability and influence to induce others to do likewise.

(2.) The resolution made that those who were first invited should be finally excluded. "For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall

taste of my supper." Well might the apostle declare, "Be not deceived, God is not mocked;" he is not a being to be trifled with; and those who spurn the offers of his mercy, will have most assuredly to bear the consequences. May we be preserved from being of the number of those who judge themselves unworthy of everlasting life, for in such conduct the infatuation involved is unparalleled, an infatuation that will require eternity to comprehend, and eternity to deplore!

LEAVEN IN THE MEAL.

AND AGAIN HE SAID, WHEREUNTO SHALL I LIKEN THE KINGDOM OF GOD? IT IS LIKE LEAVEN, WHICH A WOMAN TOOK AND HID IN THREE MEASURES OF MEAL, TILL THE WHOLE WAS LEAVENED.—Luke xiii. 20, 21.

THE question with which this short but most instructive parable is introduced, is one which Jesus frequently proposed. He here gives, as on many other occasions, an answer to it himself. But although it refers to a kingdom, it is not by comparing it with the governments of this world that he explains its nature. From objects widely different are his similitudes drawn. Let us notice,

I. THE IMPORT OF THIS COMPARISON.—The word “leaven” is used in different senses in the scriptures. We read of “the leaven of malice,” and the Saviour said to his disciples, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” False doctrines are also represented by this figure. It thus appears that the word is generally used in a bad sense, and in consequence of this, some suppose that it was so employed by our Lord on this occasion. But such could not be the case, and that for two reasons.

1. According to such a view this representation does not harmonise with the subsequent history of the church. It is true that evil influences were early at work, and that they spread in after ages to a fearful extent. But notwithstanding the many corruptions which prevailed, there has not been, even in the worst times, a universal apostacy. Hitherto the whole mass has certainly not been leavened, nor have we any reason to fear that in this sense it ever will. Such a calamity would be

nothing less than the total extinction of the church of Christ, and so the promise would be falsified which declares that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

2. This interpretation is opposed to the entire scope of the other parables which the Saviour delivered on the same occasion. There is that of the mustard seed for example, the subject of which is progress, and not declension. The design of the parable before us is evidently the same; the only difference between them is, that while the former relates to what is general and external, this has more direct reference to the success of the gospel as regards individuals, and points out the manner in which it operates when it becomes the power of God unto salvation. Having thus seen in what sense the comparison here employed should be understood, we have next to consider—

II. ITS APPROPRIATENESS.—Viewing the kingdom of God, as we have just stated, not in its outward manifestations, but according to the Saviour's words, "Behold, the kingdom of God is within you;" we shall now show in what respects it is like the act which is here spoken of, that of a woman taking leaven and hiding it in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened. We may observe concerning leaven, that its influence is—

1. Invisible. It was concealed in the meal, and there, out of sight, it continued to operate. So with the work of grace: its seat is the hidden man of the heart: and although in time its outward effects will be manifest, yet in itself it is imperceptible.

2. Silent. The most powerful and beneficial agencies are not the most noisy, but the reverse. In the revolutions of the planets, the diffusion of light, the coming of the seasons, the falling of the dew, there is a total absence of all clamour and commotion. Men are fond of bustle and excitement, and their projects are generally ushered into notice with much outward display. But the kingdom of God cometh not with observation;

secretly and silently is it established in the soul. No work is so unobtrusive, and yet none is so important.

3. *Progressive.* It begins at the centre, and proceeds gradually until the operation is completed. It is the same with divine grace in the soul. The work is not accomplished at once, but by degrees, although the process is more rapid in the case of some than it is with others.

4. *Assimilating.* While it does not destroy the meal, yet it completely alters its properties. It is still the same, and yet how different! Now when the truth is received in the love thereof, the man is changed into the same image. He is transformed by the renewing of his mind, and thus becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus.

III. THE LESSONS IT CONVEYS.

1. *Of encouragement.* After the leaven has begun to operate, it does not rest until the entire mass is brought under its influence. And what says the apostle? "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

2. *It calls for self-inquiry.* Has this important process been commenced in our hearts? .

THE TEN VIRGINS.

THEN SHALL THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN BE LIKENED UNTO TEN VIRGINS, WHICH TOOK THEIR LAMPS, AND WENT FORTH TO MEET THE BRIDEGROOM. AND FIVE OF THEM WERE WISE, AND FIVE WERE FOOLISH. THEY THAT WERE FOOLISH TOOK THEIR LAMPS, AND TOOK NO OIL WITH THEM: BUT THE WISE TOOK OIL IN THEIR VESSELS WITH THEIR LAMPS. AND AT MIDNIGHT THERE WAS A CRY MADE, BEHOLD, THE BRIDEGROOM COMETH, &c.—Matt. xxv. 1-13.

THERE is an obvious connection between the commencement of the present and the close of the preceding chapter. This is evident from the manner in which the words of the text are introduced. “Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins:” the word *then* shows that certain circumstances which had been already noticed are here referred to.

The subjects introduced in the former chapter are the destruction of Jerusalem and the day of judgment. By an easy transition our Lord passes from the one to the other. At the same time it is clear that here the allusion is to the latter event alone. It does not seem that there was anything in the state of the Jews which answered to the representation given in this parable; so that we are warranted in considering it as relating exclusively to the second advent of the Redeemer. It is a description, not of the Jewish nation, but of the Christian church; what is compared is the kingdom of heaven, or the gospel dispensation; and that not at its first establishment or subsequent progress, but at the period of its final consummation.

As is well known this parable is founded upon certain observances connected with the celebration of the marriage rite, both among the Hebrews and other Oriental

nations. But as they have been frequently described, we shall proceed, without any further delay, to notice some of the most prominent truths which are here set forth.

I. THE CHARACTERS DELINEATED.—“ Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.” In connection with this part of the subject there are three particulars to be considered.

1. That the visible church is composed of persons of opposite states and conditions. This truth is very frequently brought before us, especially in the parables of Christ. Many are the representations which he gives of the church, and in nearly all of them this feature prominently appears. Is it a field? The true grain and worthless tares are growing together. Is it a garner? Upon its floor the chaff and the wheat are intermingled. Is it a fold? The sheep and the goats are lodged there promiscuously. Is it a net? Fish of all kinds are gathered into it. So it has been from the beginning, and so it is likely to continue unto the end. In the purest Christian communities there are formalists and vain pretenders, while in the most corrupt there are some who fear the Lord, and sincerely devote themselves to his service.

In the above similitudes the mixed condition of the church is only shown in a general way; but the passage before us contains a more literal and definite statement. At the same time it is doubtful whether we are authorized to lay any special stress upon the numbers which are specified, and regard them as setting forth the relative proportion in which the wise and foolish, or true believers and nominal professors, stand to each other.

Stier asks, "whether, in this halving number, a precisely corresponding truth is to be sought?" And he adds, "we venture to answer, One should almost think so." If such be the case, the thought is most appalling. Those who make an open profession of the name of Christ, are a mere fraction when compared with such as are "without;" and yet for one half even of them to be rejected on the great day! We believe, however, that no "precisely corresponding truth" is to be sought in these numbers, and that mainly on the ground that in other parables the ratios exhibited are very different. In the one immediately succeeding, two servants out of three were good and faithful; and in that of the marriage feast, when the king came in to see the guests, all received his royal approval with the exception of a single individual. Still we are assured, and that in language the most express, the parabolic element being altogether excluded, that "many" who had been publicly identified with Christ and his cause, will be disowned by him at his coming. This solemn truth should awaken our souls to godly jealousy, especially when it is connected with the topic which we have next to consider.

2. That notwithstanding the present mixed condition of the church, it is not always easy to distinguish the truly pious from those who are destitute of the root of the matter. The whole of these virgins, in several leading particulars, bore a common resemblance, and it was not until the bridegroom appeared that the difference was made apparent. They were all his professed friends; they were no doubt all dressed alike, being arrayed in the garments usually worn on such festive occasions; they all went out to meet him, and stationed themselves at the place assigned to them; they were all provided with the necessary lamps; they all had oil in their lamps; and all had their lamps duly lighted. So great was the similarity, so various and minute the points of agree-

ment between them. And so with the Christian church. In the eyes of men there may be little or nothing to distinguish its members from each other, while there exists a most essential and radical difference notwithstanding.

The outward and visible form of religion is one thing, its inward and spiritual life is another thing. We may carry the lamp of a flaming profession, a profession not dishonoured by any glaring impropriety, our whole course and conduct being outwardly blameless, and yet be strangers to vital godliness. In the observance of divine ordinances we may be regular, and apparently serious and devout; our minds may be deeply affected, and our understanding highly enlightened; our creed may be sound, our talents may be eminent, our zeal may be warm and glowing, our usefulness even may be great; while, after all, we may only have a name to live, and know nothing of real, saving, experimental religion. Oh, how far is it possible for us to go, and yet deceive ourselves and others!

3. That one special feature by which all who possess the wisdom which cometh from above are distinguished, is the provision they make, not only for their more immediate wants, but also for future contingencies. This, it will be perceived, is the single point of contrast between the two classes into which these virgins are divided. The wisdom of the wise was shown in their forethought; not merely did they take lamps with them, but they took an additional quantity of oil in their vessels. The foolish, on the other hand, only secured a present supply, being unmindful of the necessity that might arise for feeding the flame with fresh oil, in case the former stock should be exhausted. The consequence was that their lamps went out, and that at the very time when the light was most urgently needed.

Our religion, if only a transient blaze, will be altogether unavailing; and transient it cannot fail to be,

even should the outward profession be maintained, unless it springs from a principle that is hidden and divine, and also continually replenished with the invigorating influences of the divine Spirit. Whether the oil in the vessel was expressly intended to signify grace in the heart or not, certain it is that if we are destitute of that grace, the main thing is lacking. Everything else will vanish, but this will endure. It is not like a blaze of straw, brilliant for a moment, but soon gone; on the contrary, it resembles the fire on the Jewish altar which, kindled by the breath of heaven, never went out. It is not like the summer brook, that soon dries up, leaving its shallow bed all parched and bare; it is symbolized rather by those copious streams which flow from a perennial fountain, and whose waters fail not, be the heat ever so scorching, or the drought ever so severe.

It is recorded of a certain Spartan that he attempted to make a corpse stand; but failing to do so he said, "It wants something within." So it was with the foolish virgins, and so it is with the numerous class represented by them—they want something within. Unless we have something within, we cannot possibly stand; all our expectations, however ardent, will, sooner or later, inevitably perish.

II. THE IMPORTANT EVENT ANNOUNCED.—"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made. Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." We have here—

1. A mournful statement. The wicked servant, of whom we read in the previous chapter, said, "My lord delayeth his coming;" not expecting his return for a lengthened period, he felt that he could live as he pleased, and give full swing to his evil inclinations. With the virgins, however, it was otherwise: they looked for the speedy appearance of the bridegroom; but not coming as soon as they expected, the conse-

quence was, that "they all slumbered and slept." That true believers may sink into a drowsy condition is too evident to be denied. If they were in no danger of being thus overcome, we should not find so many exhortations addressed to them on the subject, exhortations which we should all seriously lay to heart.

2. An arousing cry. "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh." From this we are not to conclude that the Saviour will come literally at that hour. In fact such cannot be the case, at least not as regards all parts of the world, for while it is midnight on one side of the globe, it is midday on the other. But as midnight is a time when deep sleep falleth upon men, and when, under its influence, all the faculties of the mind lie dormant—a time of indifference and unconsciousness of any approaching danger—so will it be when the heavenly Bridegroom shall appear. He will come unawares, even as a thief stealing with noiseless steps upon the slumbers of an unsuspecting family, as the former chapter more fully shows.

To the cry which will announce that glorious event, the apostle refers in those majestic words, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." All the representations which are given of his final advent show that it will be attended with the greatest pomp and splendour. "It might suit his purpose," as it has been well observed, "when he came to redeem the world, to steal into it without honour, to come and shrink from public observation, to be trained up in poverty and humility, for the fulfilment of the special designs for which his Father sent him. Such circumstances might suit the character of his first coming; but when he appears the second time, it will be to judge the world. He comes to accomplish the purposes of his mercy, in the public acknowledgment of his people, and of his justice, in the public punishment

of the wicked. With him will come his holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, leaving heaven for a time in solitude, that its inhabitants may witness the final results of his mediatorial plan, and be present at that most important act by which he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father. Then shall the startling cry awake a slumbering world, and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him."

3. A solemn summons. "Go ye out to meet him." For those who have slighted the Saviour, to meet him will be terrible indeed; and yet meet him they must, notwithstanding their earnest entreaties that the rocks and mountains might fall on them, and hide them from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. But to those who have loved and served him, it will be like the jubilee trumpet, "a gladly solemn sound." Often have they gone to meet him on earth, and the moments they have spent in spiritual fellowship with him have been most sweet and profitable. Often have they gone to meet him in his house, and there they have realised his promised presence, which has led them to say with the Psalmist, that a day spent in his courts is better than a thousand. Often have they gone to meet him at his table, and he has met with them at the breaking of the bread, and fed their waiting souls with richer nourishment than even angels' food. Often have they gone to meet him at his footstool, and he has communed with them from the mercy-seat, whereby they have been enabled afresh to go on their way rejoicing. But this will be a summons to meet him, not in the ordinances of his grace, but on the throne of his glory. It will be to meet him in order to be for ever with him, to gaze upon his lovely face, and join with numbers without number in chanting his praise. No wonder, therefore, that the people of God are so frequently represented as those who are looking and longing for his appearing. And it would be well for us

to ask ourselves whether our love to Christ will stand this test. Are we wont to exclaim, with holy impatience, "Why is his chariot so long in coming, and why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" What! shall such an event be unlooked for? Shall the great Redeemer be an unwelcome intruder when he comes? Shall such an illustrious visitor have none to greet him with transporting joy and gladness? And who can be expected to hail his advent unless we do who profess to be his followers and friends? No wonder that an ungodly world should be unconcerned about his coming. No wonder that they should prefer his continued absence, and say, "Delay thy promise, roll back thy chariot wheels;" for other objects occupy their thoughts, and engage their affections. But surely it should be otherwise with us. Our whole lives should be spent in anticipation of this glorious event. Again and again, even with ceaseless reiteration should we cry, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

III. THE RESULTS WHICH SUBSEQUENTLY TRANSPIRED.—
We have—

1. A hurried preparation. "Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps." It was well for the wise that in their case there was not much to be done; in a few moments they were enabled to put everything in order, and then go forth to obey the summons which they had just received. But it is evident that they were culpable in not making a more strenuous effort, either by stirring about or in some other way, to preserve themselves from slumbering in such a place and at such a season, and thereby prevent the confusion, however slight and momentary, into which they were now thrown. How necessary is it then that our loins should be continually girded, and our lamps be continually burning; burning not dim and flickering, but with a clear and growing effulgence. We need not say that we have precept upon precept, exhortation upon exhortation,

addressed to us in reference to this matter ; and blessed are those who give earnest heed thereto, and in whose spirit and deportment they are habitually embodied. Such, when death comes, will have nothing to do but to die.

2. A sad discovery. “ And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil ; for our lamps are gone out.” Disturbed by the midnight cry, their eyes were suddenly opened ; but it was to see their shame, and to feel their destitution. In their expiring torches (for our lamps are *going out* appears to be the correct rendering) they beheld the greatness of their folly ; and how bitterly would they bewail their former carelessness and infatuation ; carelessness in neglecting to secure an adequate supply of oil, and infatuation in presuming that what they had would be sufficient. In their distress they apply to their more thoughtful and prudent companions ; but they were unable to afford them any relief, and had to say in reply to their urgent request, “ Not so : lest there be not enough for us and you : but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.” They did at once as they were directed, and the sequel shows what were the consequences which ensued.

On many a death-bed something very similar to this has been witnessed. The sinner, after having spent his life in forgetfulness of God, is at length awakened to a sense of his awful guilt and danger. Finding himself on the verge of the eternal world, and knowing full well that he is altogether unprepared for the solemn realities which await him, he is filled with the greatest alarm. Thus terrified, he sends for a Christian minister, or some of the people of God, to pay him a visit. With agonising importunity he makes his appeal to them as soon as they enter his doleful chamber. But, alas ! in such an emergency what can they do ? To hear his piteous cries, to see his imploring looks, to feel his convulsive grasp, is sufficient to melt a heart of stone ; and

yet how feeble then is all human compassion, and how worthless all human aid ! At the arrival of the period referred to in those solemn words—" when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you," it will be found that vain indeed is the help of man.

And what has frequently taken place at the hour of death, will doubtless be still more impressively realized on the day of judgment. Ungodly children may call with shrieks of agony upon their pious parents, but they will call to no purpose. If thou, profligate youth, continue in thine iniquity, and at length die in thy sins, it will be altogether unavailing for thee to stretch out thy hands to a father or a mother on that great day. They have often prayed for thee, often expostulated with thee, often wept over thee ; but all their entreaties and all their tears hast thou hitherto disregarded. O be wise, wise in time, wise for thyself ; and seek from Him, who is exalted a Prince and a Saviour, that grace and succour of which he is the exclusive source, and the all-bountiful and ever-ready bestower.

3. A happy entrance. " And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came ; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage : and the door was shut." Such, in the case of the wise virgins, was the blissful consummation. Their anxieties are now all over, and they take their place, as guests acknowledged and approved, at the nuptial banquet. After they and the rest of the company were admitted, the door was at once closed, both for the security of those who were within, and the exclusion of those who were without.

But as they could not have found admission unless they were ready, neither can we into the heavenly kingdom, which is not only a purchased place for a purchased people, but also a prepared place for a prepared people. Thus the great thing is for us to be ready ; and

then, whenever the summons is given, we shall be welcomed to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and partake of the blessedness of those who are

“Far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in.”

4. An unavailing appeal. “Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.” Their prayer, although so earnest, was unsuccessful. It was now too late; and thus all their pains were lost, and all their hopes disappointed.

But let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:—“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”

THE WATCHFUL SERVANTS.

LET YOUR LOINS BE GIRDED ABOUT, AND YOUR LIGHTS BURNING; AND YE YOURSELVES LIKE UNTO MEN THAT WAIT FOR THEIR LORD, WHEN HE SHALL RETURN FROM THE WEDDING; THAT WHEN HE COMETH AND KNOCKETH, THEY MAY OPEN UNTO HIM IMMEDIATELY. BLESSED ARE THOSE SERVANTS, WHOM THE LORD WHEN HE COMETH SHALL FIND WATCHING: VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT HE SHALL GIRD HIMSELF, AND MAKE THEM TO SIT DOWN TO MEAT, AND WILL COME FORTH AND SERVE THEM.—
Luke xii. 35-38.

THE Saviour is here addressing his disciples, whom he had just called “a little flock,” and to whom he declared that it was his Father’s good pleasure to give them the kingdom. But while he encouraged them with the prospect of so glorious a recompense, he also exhorted them to the performance of certain duties which in the meanwhile they had to discharge. Let us consider—

I. THE POSTURE DESCRIBED.—“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he shall return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.”

1. Of readiness. The long and flowing robes worn in the East impede the free action of the limbs. Those therefore who were required to employ themselves actively, fastened up their garments, or girded them about their loins. So must the believer lay aside every weight which encumbers him, and disentangle himself from such affairs of this life as would prevent his being ready for his Master’s service.

2. Of expectation. We are to learn, not only to labour, but also to wait. Concerning this duty we may observe that it is—

(1.) Frequently enjoined. We are called upon to rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him; though the vision tarry, we are to wait for it; through the Spirit we are to wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. Addressing the Corinthians, the apostle says, "So that ye came behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." He had referred to several other attainments, but he reserves the mention of this to the last, as if it were the most important of all.

(2.) Difficult to be discharged. It is weary work to wait, especially to wait long. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick. We are naturally impatient; but God has his own purposes to accomplish by trying our faith, and leading us to persevere in looking to and trusting in him.

(3.) We are furnished with many striking instances in which this grace was exemplified. Abraham especially, of whom it is said, "And so after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise," or received the fulfilment of it.

II. THE CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH RENDERED THE ABOVE ATTITUDE NECESSARY.

1. The occasion was one of great importance. "And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he shall return from the wedding." He had gone to take to himself a bride, and for him to come back, and not find everything in order, would have been a sore mortification.

2. The precise time of his return was uncertain. It is stated that it was a maxim with Julius Cæsar never to inform his soldiers beforehand of the hour at which they were to leave their encampments or encounter their foes, that they might be habitually prepared to obey his orders.

III. THE CONSIDERATION BY WHICH THIS DUTY IS ENFORCED.—"Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto

you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." We may well ask, "Is this the manner of men, O Lord God?" To see a master waiting upon his servants would be a strange sight; but the Lord Jesus when on earth was among his disciples as one that served; and according to the representation which is here given, he will minister to them in a similar capacity in heaven. "This," it has been observed, "is one of the most extraordinary promises of the New Testament. The blessedness of Christ's servants is set forth, not merely by their serving him in the celestial state, but by his serving them! He will there serve his faithful servants for ever; as he ministered to them grace here, so will he delight to minister the honours and rewards of his eternal kingdom hereafter."

THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING'S SON

AND JESUS ANSWERED AND SPAKE UNTO THEM AGAIN BY PARABLES, AND SAID, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO A CERTAIN KING, WHICH MADE A MARRIAGE FOR HIS SON, AND SENT FORTH HIS SERVANTS TO CALL THEM THAT WERE BIDDEN TO THE WEDDING: AND THEY WOULD NOT COME. AGAIN, HE SENT FORTH OTHER SERVANTS, SAYING, TELL THEM WHICH ARE BIDDEN, BEHOLD, I HAVE PREPARED MY DINNER: MY OXEN AND FATLINGS ARE KILLED, AND ALL THINGS ARE READY: COME UNTO THE MARRIAGE. BUT THEY MADE LIGHT OF IT, AND WENT THEIR WAYS, ONE TO HIS FARM, ANOTHER TO HIS MERCHANDISE: AND THE REMNANT TOOK HIS SERVANTS, AND ENTREATED THEM SPITEFULLY, AND SLEW THEM. BUT WHEN THE KING HEARD THEREOF HE WAS WROTH," &c.—Matt. xxii. 1-14.

SEVERAL of our Lord's parables possess many features in common, and in some instances the similarity is so great that they have been regarded as identical. This especially applies to that of the gospel supper, contained in the 14th chapter of Luke, and the one which is here recorded. Stier calls this a more expanded repetition of the former, and speaks of it as a striking example of the fact, that the wisdom and love of Christ condescended to such repetitions. It is evident, however, that while there are many points of resemblance between them, there is also considerable diversity; and hence to give them a separate examination cannot be regarded as unnecessary. Confining ourselves at present to what is here stated, we remark, in the first place, that we have set before us—

I. A MONARCH'S CELEBRATION OF AN INTERESTING EVENT.—“And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son.” The introductory formula, contained in the first

verse, does not always signify that what is spoken is intended as a reply to what had been previously advanced; nor is it to be regarded even as an invariable indication of the continuance of the same subject. The words are sometimes employed at the commencement of a new discourse, and such is the case on this occasion. It would seem that our Lord was now addressing the people in the temple, and that he did not immediately refer to any special class among them. In the parable of the vineyard, which we have in the concluding part of the former chapter, there was obvious allusion to the chief priests and Pharisees; so obvious was it that "they perceived that he spake of them." They departed, however, immediately after, as Mark informs us. "And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people; for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way."

1. The king here referred to is evidently the Most High. This title, it is scarcely necessary to state, is frequently given to him; but it is important for us to remember that it is not, as many suppose, a mere earthly designation of the Supreme Ruler, in order to give us some faint idea of his glorious character and perfections. His title is not borrowed from that of the monarchs of this world, but theirs, on the contrary, is borrowed from his. It is only lent to them, and it is merely in an accommodated sense that it can be used by them. The human is nothing but a lower form of the heavenly; the one is simply the copy, while the other is the divine original. All temporal functions and relationships are but dim reflections of those which are sustained by the great Eternal. Dim reflections indeed; for the present term, and the correlative ones—kingdom, government, throne, sceptre—in the sense in which men are familiar with them, are altogether inadequate to represent Him. Take the loftiest potentates, with all that is splendid in their courts, all that is glorious in

their exploits, all that is commanding in their authority, all that is wise in their counsels, all that is just and beneficent in their administration; and what are they in comparison with Him, "who bringeth princes to nothing, and maketh the judges of the earth as vanity!" We may compare very dissimilar things together; the mole-hill may be compared with the towering Alps, and the glow-worm with the sun's meridian blaze: but when the finite and the infinite are brought together, any sort of resemblance is out of the question.

2. This king had a son who had taken to himself a bride. While our Saviour almost invariably called himself the Son of man, the inspired writers are accustomed to speak of him as the Son of God. And the term as thus applied is used in a special acceptation: for what says the apostle? "Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" These words clearly show that he is the Son of God in a sense so peculiar and exalted that even the angelic hosts, the principalities and powers in heavenly places, can lay no claim to it. As to the representation here given, that of his entering into the conjugal relation, it is one that is frequently employed to set forth the spiritual connection which subsists between him and the church. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house: so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him." But whatever beauty his bride possesses, and we are assured that it is surpassingly great, for she is said to be "all glorious within, and her clothing is of wrought gold;" yet in her natural state there was nothing attractive. The condition in which he originally found her was that of loathsome defilement: she was forlorn, naked, perishing, and weltering in her blood. But polluted as she was, when he passed by, and looked upon her, it was with pity and compassion; he spread his skirt over her,

and covered her nakedness; he had her washed, and clothed, and educated; he then entered into a covenant with her, and she became his. At length she presented a very different aspect from what she was formerly; but she had to acknowledge that she was comely with the comeliness with which he had adorned her.

3. On the occasion of his marriage a splendid banquet was provided. Royal feasts are always distinguished by being sumptuous and abundant; but this would be especially so, since it was in celebration of no ordinary event. It is doubtless to be regarded as symbolical of the provision set forth in the gospel for our sinful race. There we have a table spread with all that can gratify the spiritual appetite; a table covered with dainties more costly and delicious even than angels' food. Those who have partaken thereof have been lavish in their praise of the magnificence of the great Provider, all being ready to join with the spouse in saying, "He brought me to his banqueting house, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." What the world has to set before its votaries is little better than the wretched diet by which the prodigal sought to support his miserable existence; for "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him." But of all who avail themselves of the heavenly feast it can be said, "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house, and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasure." Here they can fare sumptuously every day, and without any fear that the provisions will fail; for the feast of fat things will be inexhaustible, however numerous the guests may be.

"Rivers of love and mercy here,
In a rich ocean join;
Salvation in abundance flows,
Like floods of milk and wine."

But what is next brought before us is of a less pleasing character. We have now to turn from the monarch's celebration of this interesting event to witness—

II. HIS MUNIFICENCE DESPISED BY HIS UNGRATEFUL SUBJECTS.—Under this head there are three particulars to be considered.

1. The invitation he sent, and the way in which it was responded to. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding : and they would not come.” To refuse, under such circumstances, appears exceedingly strange : and yet it is only what occurs continually in reference to the gracious overtures which are made by the God of love and mercy in the gospel. To be invited to a royal feast among men is regarded as a high honour, an honour which no one in this country would think of declining. Besides, a king's invitation is always regarded as equivalent to a command, and it is in the latter form that it is usually addressed. But regardless alike of the proposed honour on the one hand, and the disobedience involved on the other, it is said of these persons that “they would not come.”

The first call being slighted, it was followed by another, and one still more earnest and pressing. “Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner ; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready : come unto the marriage.” It is most probable that the literal reference of these words is to the ministry of the apostles subsequent to the resurrection of Christ. It was not until then that the consideration, “all things are ready,” could be urged as an inducement in their appeals to their fellow-countrymen. What the ancient patriarchs, what prophets, and kings, and righteous men through many generations, had looked forward to with longing desire, could now be announced as actually accomplished. The

preparations which had been going on from the foundation of the world, and which were planned before time began, were brought to a successful and glorious termination. To make all things ready, the eternal Word was made flesh, appeared in the form of a servant, and in the room of the guilty became obedient unto death, and rose again from the dead for their justification. The law which we had broken was magnified and made honourable; satisfaction was rendered to divine justice by a complete and adequate atonement for sin; the head of the old serpent was bruised; the world, and death, and hell, were overcome; an everlasting righteousness was brought in; and pardon, reconciliation, and eternal life procured, in full consistency with all the divine perfections. Thus the work was great, and the cost enormous, in getting the banquet of mercy ready. Neither men nor angels could afford the least assistance in its preparation. But He who trod the wine-press alone, exclaimed on the cross, "It is finished;" and hence this plea, which should have been so powerful and persuasive was urged, "All things are ready: come unto the marriage." It was urged, however, in vain; the second invitation was no more favourably regarded than the first.

2. The causes of their rejecting so kind an offer. The gracious overtures of the gospel are set at naught by the children of men for various reasons. They make light of its provisions, for example, because they do not feel their need of them. We are assured that they who are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. It is true that all are infected with the malady of sin, yet few are duly sensible of this: such insensibility is indeed a constituent part of the disease; and while it continues, the offered remedy is sure to be disregarded. There is again, ignorance, pride, unbelief, self-righteousness: but here three causes are more especially specified.

(1.) Indisposition. "They would not come." It was

not that there was anything really to prevent them, but they were not inclined to go. So it is with sinners still. The complaint of our Lord is as applicable now as it was to the Jews of old, "Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." It is in the will that the difficulty under which men labour in regard to salvation mainly lies; and as it is impossible for any one to act contrary to his prevailing inclination, that other statement which the Saviour made is equally true, "No man *can* come unto me, except the Father draw him."

(2.) Love of the world. "But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise." In no part of the scriptures are we exhorted to neglect the lawful avocations of the present life; but how many set the claims of business in opposition to the claims of God, and the concerns of eternity! The world has such entire possession of their thoughts, that they have no time as well as no inclination to attend to what is pre-eminently the one thing needful. In all ages men have been in danger of neglecting salvation from this cause; but never was the peril so great as it is at present. "If Nebuchadnezzar's image," says John Newton, "had been of solid gold, and every worshipper allowed to take a piece of it, I fear that our nation as well as his, would be ready to fall down before it." Wealth, in the vocabulary of thousands around us, signifies the chief good, and its attainment is regarded as the great end of existence. With them, in direct contradiction to what our Lord has stated, "A man's life consisteth in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." And when such is the case, the gospel and its blessings will inevitably be made light of.

(3.) Open malignity. The simple rejection of the truth, indifference to its requirements, and setting the affections on the things of time and sense, show the alienation of the heart, and its repugnance to what is holy and heavenly; but there are some in whom it

assumes a more determined and hostile form, leading them to maltreat and persecute the messengers of God. "And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them." Three kinds of outrage are here enumerated; and in the treatment which the apostles and early disciples received, as recorded in the book of Acts, we have a literal fulfilment of these words. First, "they took his servants," seized them, laid hold upon them; and how frequently this was done is well known. Of the Sadducees it is said that, filled with indignation, "they laid their hands upon the apostles, and put them in the common prison." In the earliest intimation that is given of the persecuting career of Saul, we have this statement: "he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison." The next clause, "and entreated them spitefully," is as fully illustrated in the same inspired history. We read, "And when they had called the apostles, *and beaten them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go." So with Paul, a persecutor no longer, when Ananias the high priest ordered those who stood by to smite him on the mouth; likewise Jason, whose house was assaulted at the instigation of certain envious Jews; and many other instances of the same kind. But it is added, as the climax of all—"and slew them." For an affecting commentary on this expression, we need only refer to the case of Stephen, who was stoned to death, and James the brother of John, who was killed with the sword. Such, when restraining influences are removed, is the desperate enmity of the human heart against God and his truth. Not only are his gracious overtures rejected, but the messengers of his mercy are treated with bitter scorn, and made the special objects of their deadly animosity.

3. The consequences that ensued. "But when the

king heard thereof, he was wroth ; and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." By such conduct he could not be otherwise than provoked. To have his kindness rejected with cool indifference by some, and spurned with unreasonable spite and cruelty by others, was sure to call forth his resentment. Besides, the indignity with which his servants were treated, he looked upon as intended for himself, as in all cases where an ambassador is outraged, the insult is directed against the monarch whom he represents. It was therefore necessary that such monstrous ingratitude and daring rebellion should be avenged ; so he sent forth his armies to execute his vengeance, a vengeance which was to be inflicted to the very uttermost. It was not to the messengers who had been entrusted with his previous invitations that the work of destruction was committed. His servants are to wield no sword but that of the Spirit ; they are to inflict no wounds except those of the heart and conscience. No blood are they to shed, though ready to have their own spilt sooner than prove faithless to the solemn trust with which they are charged. Of the coming wrath they have to warn their fellow-creatures, but its infliction rests with ministers of another class, even those who bear not the sword in vain. Thus the hosts of Rome were the instruments employed in punishing the Jewish people ; employed by him who had borne with them so long, but whose forbearance had at length reached its limits. In reality it was He, the Lord of hosts, and not Titus or Vespasian, that marshalled the armed legions against Jerusalem ; and the emperor of the world was only the rod of his anger, as the Assyrian had been heretofore, wherewith he punished the aggravated offence of despising the offers of his mercy, and rejecting the Son of his love.

In the many privileges which had been conferred on the Jews we " behold the goodness," while in the awful

doom with which they were visited, we see "the severity of God." Indeed the expressions here employed are awfully alarming, and intimate that although on so many other occasions, mercy and judgment were intermingled, it was to be now judgment without mercy. The determination expressed is extreme, unmitigated, and terribly emphatic. "He sent forth his armies, and *destroyed* those murderers," destroyed them with an utter destruction.

There is, in addition to the immediate act of vengeance which these words express, something fearfully ominous in the latter clause, which says, "And burned up *their* city." Jerusalem had long been God's city, being called with special emphasis, "the city of the great King." He had chosen it for his special habitation, saying, "Here will I dwell, for I have desired it." But now it is spoken of as *their* city, the city of these murderers, for he would no longer acknowledge it as his own. In like manner the Saviour said on another occasion, "Behold, *your* house is left unto you desolate;" your house, not mine, for I have forsaken it, and ceased to make it the place of my abode. Even at a far earlier period we find God addressing Moses in similar language, "Go, get thee down; for *thy* people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves." As if he had said, I have done with them, and will have nothing more to do with a race so stubborn and rebellious. But then the earnest prayer of his servant prevailed, and "the Lord repented him of the evil which he thought to do unto his people." Here, however, it was otherwise; the doom denounced was not recalled; and the covenant which he had made with their fathers, was not merely suspended, but finally dissolved.

III. THE ROYAL BOUNTY AT LENGTH APPRECIATED.—
 "Then said he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall

find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found: and the wedding was furnished with guests." In this part of the subject, two things are more especially brought before us.

1. The messengers were entrusted with a fresh commission. Of those who had been previously bidden, it is said that "they were not worthy." This is not to be understood in the sense of meritoriousness, for in that respect all are unworthy. The meaning probably is *well-disposed*, as we read in a former chapter of this gospel: "And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go hence." The persons referred to in this passage seem to be those who were disposed to receive the disciples, who evinced a friendly disposition, and were inclined to listen to their instructions. Or the idea set forth may be that of *fitness*, as when the Saviour declared, "He that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me:" that is, there would be no congruity between such a disciple and his master, no correspondence of the one to the other. Thus on the occasion before us, there was an utter discordance between the tastes and dispositions of those who were invited to the feast, and the honours and blessings prepared for their acceptance.

The servants were consequently sent to another and totally different class, the commission they now received being expressed in these words: "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage." The offering of the gospel to the Gentiles is here evidently intended. Jerusalem was the central point of the Jewish theocracy; and the feet of the messengers now leaving the city, turning their backs upon it, and entering the public roads as they branched off in all directions, clearly indicated that the time had arrived for a new order of things to be established.

What is here declared is only a parabolic representation of that which the apostle states, without any ambiguity, in those memorable words: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves *unworthy* of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

2. The response which their message received. It was in many respects a dangerous as well as discouraging enterprise on which they now entered. The fate which had befallen their fellow-servants might well fill them with apprehension, for how probable was it that they would be similarly treated. But no craven spirit was that of the early ambassadors of the cross. They felt that it was their work, not to hesitate, not to question, but to obey. When the great Master said Go; each and all had but one reply to make, "Here am I, send me." But independent of the danger, there was the disheartening thought, that as the invitation had been slighted hitherto, so in all likelihood it would be again. But neither consideration moved them, and in the success they met with, their courage, their fidelity, their devotedness, received an ample reward. "So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both good and bad: and the wedding was furnished with guests."

The terms "good" and "bad," which are here employed, are not to be taken in a moral sense. They rather signify persons of all classes and conditions. But although no moral distinctions are intended, still improper characters were gathered in, one at least, as the latter section of the parable shows, which we now hasten to consider.

IV. THE ASSEMBLED COMPANY INSPECTED, AND THE CONSEQUENCES THAT ENSUED.

1. The spectacle which was beheld. "And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which

had not on a wedding garment." It would seem that the king occupied another apartment with his own family, and did not sit at the feast with the guests. But after the company had taken their places in the banquetting hall he looked in, to see that they were properly attended to, and receive their congratulations on the marriage of his son. No sooner had he done so than his eye fell upon one who dishonoured the occasion, and insulted the royal entertainer, by appearing in an unsuitable dress. It should be borne in mind that no people are so rigid in their etiquette as the Orientals, and in their view want of compliance with the established modes of expressing respect is regarded as a most heinous offence.

In its spiritual meaning a variety of opinions have been entertained concerning the wedding garment. One thing is certain, without speaking too dogmatically as to what is here more immediately signified, that none will find acceptance on the great day, but those who have put on the Lord Jesus Christ as their justifying righteousness. The evangelical prophet, with evident reference to gospel times, represents the church as saying, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God ; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." And with the additional light which the New Testament throws on the subject, we are left in no uncertainty as to what this robe of righteousness indicates. In the words of the apostle, it is "to win Christ, and be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." At the same time, He who is the righteousness is also the sanctification of his people ; and all to whom his merits are imputed as their title to heaven, have the graces of his Spirit implanted in them as their meetness for it.

2. The question proposed. "And he saith unto him,

Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? and he was speechless." The word rendered "friend" is one that was often used in addressing a stranger, and does not necessarily imply friendship or affection. A friend, in our sense of the term, this person certainly was not, for his conduct shows that he was destitute of all true love and loyalty. The language addressed to him, "How camest thou in hither?" is that of indignant rebuke; and when thus challenged by the king, he was utterly confounded. So will it be with all formalists, all self-deceivers, all hypocritical pretenders, in the day of final scrutiny. However they may attempt to excuse themselves now, they will be speechless then.

3. The doom pronounced. "Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The servants to whom the execution of this fearful sentence was entrusted, are of another class from those who were previously sent forth with the invitation, and a different word is used in describing them: thus confirming what has been already stated, that the messengers of mercy are not appointed to be instruments of wrath. But the king had servants for this work, and to their custody this presumptuous intruder was committed. They were to bind him hand and foot, and in that state of helplessness to convey him from the splendidly-illuminated palace into outer darkness, where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. Such will be the portion of all hypocrites and unbelievers; they will be eternally banished from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

The concluding words are, "For many are called, but few chosen." If this oft-repeated saying should be connected with what has just been described, its signification will thus be, that it will happen to many as it

did to this wretched person. But it is more probable that it relates to the entire parable, and not merely to its closing scene. Large numbers were invited to the feast, but by how many was the call refused. In like manner, multitudes are now urged to accept the offered blessings of the gospel, but by the vast majority those blessings are lightly esteemed. God grant that we may not be of the number of those who neglect so great salvation! Whatever we do, let us not make light of those things which angels desire to look into; for they are the things that belong to our peace, and involve alike our present welfare and our endless bliss.

THE TWO DEBTORS.

AND JESUS ANSWERING SAID UNTO HIM, SIMON, I HAVE SOMEWHAT TO SAY UNTO THEE. AND HE SAITH, MASTER, SAY ON. THERE WAS A CERTAIN CREDITOR WHICH HAD TWO DEBTORS: THE ONE OWED FIVE HUNDRED PENCE, AND THE OTHER FIFTY. AND WHEN THEY HAD NOTHING TO PAY, HE FRANKLY FORGAVE THEM BOTH. TELL ME THEREFORE, WHICH OF THEM WILL LOVE HIM MOST? SIMON ANSWERED AND SAID, I SUPPOSE THAT HE TO WHOM HE FORGAVE MOST. AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, THOU HAST RIGHTLY JUDGED.—Luke vii. 40-43.

ON several occasions the Saviour showed in the clearest manner that “he knew what was in man.” To discern the thoughts and intents of the heart, is a divine prerogative; and by possessing and exercising that prerogative, his claims as God manifest in the flesh were abundantly confirmed. He had the power to which nothing was impossible on the one hand, and the knowledge from which nothing was concealed on the other.

The individual in whose house he appeared as a guest on this occasion, had strong misgivings concerning him, on account of the supposed absence of the above qualification. “Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a sinner.” Great, however, was the mistake under which Simon laboured. Not merely was Jesus acquainted with the outward character of this woman, but he knew his own inward thoughts; and it was in reply to the secret workings of his mind that the words before us were delivered. We shall notice—

I. THE LIABILITIES WHICH THE PERSONS REFERRED TO HAD INCURRED.—“And Jesus answering said unto him,

Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty."

1. They were both in debt. We owe to God supreme love and universal obedience. These are his requirements, the reasonableness of which all must acknowledge. But we have come short of his glory, and withheld from him his due; and hence the present representation applies to us, as it does to the whole human family.

2. Although both were debtors, the amount of what they owed differed considerably. That some are more in debt to God than others, is a truth too evident to be denied. There are degrees in guilt, as there will be in future punishment. We read of those "who sin as it were with a cart rope;" who "do evil with both hands earnestly;" and of the men of Sodom it is said, not only that they were wicked, but "sinners before the Lord exceedingly."

3. However diversified their liabilities, the one as well as the other was totally unable to meet the claims of justice. Our state without exception is one of spiritual insolvency; and although all have not failed to the same extent, yet being utterly poor and penniless, the case of each and all, the most moral and the most reprobate, as far as they themselves are concerned, is altogether hopeless.

II THE UNEXPECTED MANNER IN WHICH THEY WERE TREATED.—"And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both."

1. The discharge was full. The forgiveness which is with God is invariably represented as possessing this glorious feature. "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities." "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

2. Unconditional. While it was full on the one hand, it was free on the other. To open the way for the con-

sistent and honourable bestowal of pardoning mercy, cost much to the great Surety ; but what was so expensive to him, is to us perfectly gratuitous.

3. Cordial. The manner in which a favour is conferred adds greatly to, or detracts materially from, its value and acceptableness. God giveth liberally, and upbraideth not. It was thus that forgiveness was extended to the prodigal, and so it was in the case before us.

III. THE OBLIGATIONS UNDER WHICH THESE DEBTORS WERE LAID IN CONSEQUENCE OF WHAT WAS DONE FOR THEM.—This was the special point which the Saviour wished to impress upon the mind of Simon. The poor weeping penitent, whose presence was a sore offence to the proud Pharisee, felt no ordinary affection for Him who had spoken peace to her troubled conscience, and saved her guilty soul. What is subsequently stated, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven ; *for* she loved much :” does not express the cause of her forgiveness, but the proof of it. Just as we might say, There was a hard frost last night, *for* the river is one sheet of ice. But there is here—

1. An important principle involved. Nothing is so likely to melt the heart as a signal display of kindness. Threats, commands, reasonings, are of little avail.

“Law and terrors do but harden,
All the while they work alone ;
But a sense of blood-bought pardon,
Soon dissolves a heart of stone.”

2. The rule of proportion indicated. Of all reasonable things this is the most reasonable, that those should love much who have had much forgiven them.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

VERILY, VERILY, I SAY UNTO YOU, HE THAT ENTERETH NOT BY THE DOOR INTO THE SHEEPFOLD, BUT CLIMBETH UP SOME OTHER WAY, THE SAME IS A THIEF AND A ROBBER. BUT HE THAT ENTERETH IN BY THE DOOR IS THE SHEPHERD OF THE SHEEP. TO HIM THE PORTER OPENETH; AND THE SHEEP HEAR HIS VOICE: AND HE CALLETH HIS OWN SHEEP BY NAME, AND LEADETH THEM OUT. AND WHEN HE PUTTETH FORTH HIS OWN SHEEP, HE GOETH BEFORE THEM, AND THE SHEEP FOLLOW HIM: FOR THEY KNOW HIS VOICE. AND A STRANGER WILL THEY NOT FOLLOW, BUT WILL FLEE FROM HIM: FOR THEY KNOW NOT THE VOICE OF STRANGERS. THIS PARABLE SPAKE JESUS UNTO THEM: BUT THEY UNDERSTOOD NOT WHAT THINGS THEY WERE WHICH HE SPAKE UNTO THEM. THEN SAID JESUS UNTO THEM AGAIN, VERILY, VERILY, I SAY UNTO YOU, I AM THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP. ALL THAT EVER CAME BEFORE ME ARE THIEVES AND ROBBERS, &c.—
John x. 1-18.

WHEN our blessed Lord was engaged in his public ministry, the great subject of all his discourses was himself. He appeared on earth in a special character, as the sent of God, the long-promised and long-expected Messiah; and in his addresses to the people he called upon them to receive him as such. Those who did so, he assured that their souls would be saved; while, on the other hand, he declared that all who rejected him would die in their sins, and be consigned to endless perdition. But although this was the constant theme of his exhortations, and although so much depended upon submitting to his authority, yet it was a very unusual thing for him to lay claim, in so many words, to the Messiahship. Some two or three instances are all we read of, and they were on comparatively private occasions; namely, to the woman of Samaria, to the man who had been blind from his birth, and to the disciples at Caesarea Philippi. But if he rarely asserted in any

direct manner who he was, his indirect statements were continually such as left no ground whatever for hesitation.

Of this we have an example in the discourse which he now delivered, In the predictions given of the coming deliverer, he is frequently spoken of as a Shepherd; and here, by assuming that title, he virtually claims to be the great One that should come. When he says, "I am the light of the world," he evidently alludes to the many passages which speak of the light that should lighten the Gentiles; and in saying, "I am the good Shepherd," there is undoubted reference to the ancient announcement, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

We shall now proceed to glance at the leading topics set forth in the words before us. They contain an account of the great Shepherd, of the under-shepherds, and of false shepherds. The latter are mentioned first, and we therefore commence with them.

I. THE FALSE SHEPHERD.—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." In this representation the Pharisees are mainly intended, but it equally applies to all false teachers. However high their pretensions may be, they are only intruders, thrusting themselves into an office for which they are unqualified, and to which they have never been called. As there is a proper and improper, a lawful and unlawful way of entrance into a sheepfold, so is there into the church of God. The right method of gaining admittance is through the door; and it is only by the divine appointment that any are authorised to exercise the solemn and responsible functions of the Christian ministry. The Jewish scribes and doctors of the law, claimed to be the only religious guides of the people, and therefore they opposed our Lord for interfering with

them in their work. But he now tells them that they had no right to the office which they had so presumptuously usurped, and which by their evil conduct they had scandalised and disgraced. He, on the other hand, came into his office by the right way : not intruding, or “taking this honour to himself, but being called of God, as was Aaron.” Yea, not merely did he enter by the door, but, as he subsequently declares, he is himself the door ; for under the new economy which he came to establish it is his special prerogative to appoint those who are to act in any public capacity in his kingdom. “And *he* gave some, apostles ; and some, evangelists ; and some, pastors and teachers ; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” He is Head over all things to the church ; on his shoulders the government is placed : the keys are in his hand, and he openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth.

Under the old dispensation false teachers and false prophets were often denounced in the strongest and most indignant manner. It is hardly possible for us to imagine what a contemptuous term the word *dog* was, as used among the Jews ; and yet we find the sacred writers applying it, and that with the most humiliating adjuncts, to such persons. Thus Isaiah speaks of the pretended watchmen in his time. Not merely does he call them dogs, but blind dogs that cannot understand ; dumb dogs, that cannot bark ; lazy dogs, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber ; greedy dogs, which can never have enough, each seeking his gain from his quarter ; even drunken dogs, saying, “Come let us fetch wine, and fill ourselves with strong drink ; and to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.”

But here the Saviour employs epithets still more severe, his language being, “the same is a thief and a robber.” On other occasions this class are called by him ravening wolves, a generation of vipers, whited

sepulchres, children of the evil one ; titles which certainly shew that he did not use flattering words, and that he was no respecter of persons. But his words, however cutting, were always words of truth ; and those which he now employed were peculiarly appropriate. That all false teachers are thieves and robbers, is evident from the following considerations.

1. They rob God of his glory. To shew forth his praise is not their object, and the honour they seek is not that which cometh from him only. Every true servant of the Most High regards his approbation as outweighing a world of censure, and transcending a whole universe of applause. And while the divine favour is everything in his estimation, so the promotion of the divine glory is the great object at which he constantly aims. "If any man speak," says the apostle, "let him speak as the oracles of God ; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth : that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever." Now false teachers do not speak according to the oracles of God, and whatever be the design they have in view, it is not the advancement of the glory of God. They thus withhold from the Divine Being his due, and hence the awful crime of sacrilege can be laid to their charge.

2. They would deprive the Lord Jesus of all that is exalted in his character and claims. However heretics may differ, in one thing they are agreed, namely, their opposition to Christ as a divine Redeemer. In all their efforts, all their critical inquiries, all their plausible theories, they "only consult how they may cast him down from his excellency." The inspired writers make "him first, him last, him midst, and without end ;" and those are antichrists who are not like-minded with them, not imbued with their spirit, not animated with their fervent love and loyalty to Zion's King. Any one who

attempted to rob our beloved sovereign of her crown would be guilty of the highest treason; but such an offence would lose all its enormity when placed beside the daring impiety of those who seek to pluck the diadem from Immanuel's brow.

3. They take from the gospel whatever is distinctive and valuable in its nature. Its most precious doctrines they reject with proud disdain. Making their own reason the standard of truth, nothing that is supernatural, nothing that they cannot fully understand, is admitted into their system. But, as it has been well observed, "he that will believe only what he can comprehend, must have either a very small creed, or a very large comprehension." Not being endowed with the latter quality to any extraordinary extent, the consequence is that their articles of faith are exceedingly few in number. From them are excluded nearly all the great fundamental truths of Christianity; and thus what they preach is virtually another gospel, and not that, so full, so rich, so glorious, which was at first proclaimed by those teachers, whom the Son of God commissioned, and the Spirit of truth inspired.

4. They defraud the Christian of his spiritual nourishment and consolation. "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs:" but what they offer is not bread, but empty husks; not wholesome words of faith, but vain traditions and unprofitable speculations. So it was with those whose pretensions the Saviour exposed on this occasion. "Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." But they, by their false and frivolous interpretations, made the word of God of none effect, either for instruction or edification.

5. They ruin the souls of men by their deadly errors. Thus they are not thieves and robbers alone, but murderers. "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain;" yea, in a far more fearful way even than

his. He was a murderer, for he slew his brother ; but they are worse murderers, inasmuch as the loss of the soul is an inconceivably greater calamity than the death of the body.

II. THE TRUE SHEPHERD.—Several particulars are specified concerning him, by which he is distinguished from those who have been already described.

1. His entrance into the fold. “ But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.” There is but one way of admittance for pastor and people ; the sheep and the shepherd must enter through the same door, even by Him who has declared, “ I am the way, the truth, and the life ; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” And hence the first qualification in the minister of the gospel, that without which every other will be unavailing, is personal piety. Nothing can be more sad, as nothing is more inconsistent, than for men to preach an unknown Saviour ; to announce, like Caiaphas, the necessity of an atonement in which they have no interest, or proclaim in glowing terms, like Balaam, the coming of that kingdom to which they never belonged. Such resemble the electric telegraph ; the intelligence they convey is unconscious intelligence ; it is what they have never tasted or felt of the word of life. And not only should the spiritual shepherd be a partaker of divine grace, but he ought to possess it in larger measure than ordinary. Statues, if intended for an elevated position, are made larger than life ; and the piety of those who are raised to so high an office in the church will appear dwarfish, unless it be considerably above the common standard.

2. His free access. “ To him the porter openeth ;” he has no difficulty in gaining admission ; he receives a cordial welcome, it being said to him, “ Come in, thou blessed of the Lord.” Only let it be evident that a person is divinely qualified, divinely sanctioned, and divinely sent ; that, in the words of Wesley, “ he has

grace in his heart, gifts in his head, and a disposition to use both for the glory of God ;” and it is certain that Providence will not fail to set before him an open door for the exercise of his sacred calling. The great Head of the Church does not confer spiritual endowments upon his servants in order that they might be hid under a bushel ; and hence he clears the way, and makes the path of duty plain, as to the several spheres they are to occupy. If this is a world in which there is, at best, but little to be known, it is a world in which there is much to be done ; and it would ill comport with infinite wisdom for suitable instruments to be raised up, and yet have no opportunity afforded them for working in the vineyard.

3. The attention he secures. The “sheep hear his voice ;” to his instructions the children of God love to listen ; his words are sweet to their taste ; they impart strength and nourishment to their souls. Now to be esteemed by those who are the excellent of the earth, and especially to gain the approval and possess the confidence of the most spiritual of Christ’s flock, is no small matter. It is a treasure to be carefully hoarded, an honour to be highly prized ; for as the poet says,

“A good man’s praise foreshadoweth God’s,
And in His smile is heaven.”

In the message he delivers they recognise those marks which indicate its divine authority ; and so they receive it, as it is in truth, the word of God, which worketh effectually in them that believe. Hence they feel a strong attachment towards the messenger : they love him for the truth’s sake which dwelleth in him. With the church of old they can say, “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things !”

4. His knowledge of, and familiarity with, the flock. “He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them

out." It is said that Cyrus prided himself in calling by name each soldier in his large army, saying it was a shame that, while a mechanic knew the names of his tools, a general should not know the names of his soldiers. This applies still more forcibly to those who have the charge of souls, and who watch over them as they that must give account. Hence every true servant of Christ is mindful of the exhortation, "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks;" for without this he cannot properly feed them with knowledge and understanding, and give them their portion of meat in due season. He should possess, not a general, but a personal acquaintance with the people of his charge, and by ascertaining their individual characters and conditions, their fears, trials, difficulties, temptations, he will be enabled to speak a word in season; to instruct the ignorant, to confirm the wavering, to support the weak, to comfort the feeble-minded, as well as rebuke those who need more severe treatment.

5. The course he pursues. Besides leading the sheep out, and conducting them from the fold to the pasture, and from one pasture to another, as their varying circumstances required, it is said, "And when he putteth forth his own sheep, *he goeth before them*, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice; and a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers." The ministers of the gospel are not to be lords over God's heritage, but ensamples to the flock. As Paul says, "Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, *and seen in me*, do; and the God of peace shall be with you." What was seen in him was indeed worthy of the imitation of those among whom he laboured; and his whole spirit and deportment are no less worthy of being followed by all who are called to serve God in the gospel of his Son. In some respects his example appears to be altogether out of our reach; it is so much above us, that

we are in danger of contenting ourselves with merely gazing on him, even as we gaze on the gliding swallow's flight, or the march of the majestic eagle ; objects which excite our wonder and admiration, but which we never think of imitating. And yet there is a sense in which he, as an example, is by no means inimitable. For us to be as great in the kingdom of heaven as he was, may be out of the question ; still we may and should possess much of his spirit, and be in all essential points like-minded with him. A person may have his portrait drawn as large as life, and from that another small one may be taken. Now the miniature may not be an unfaithful likeness, although the scale is so much reduced, and although it is far less imposing to look at than the other. So with such men as Paul and Luther, as Whitefield and Wesley ; in spiritual stature, as well as the widely extended spheres in which they laboured, we may never come up to them ; but let us seek to be imitators of them in our narrower circles, and according to the measure of our more limited capacities. In proportion as we are so, we shall be leaders of the flock of Christ, and we shall exemplify the truth of the poet's representation,

“ He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,
Allured to brighter worlds, *and led the way.*”

III. THE CHIEF SHEPHERD.—“ This parable spake Jesus unto them : but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers : but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door : by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy : I am come that they might have life, and

that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd : the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." The Saviour here represents himself as the door on the one hand, and the shepherd on the other ; and in consequence of what he had previously said not being rightly apprehended, he does this in a manner the most clear, and with those verbal repetitions in which his discourses often abounded. All who came before him, he states, were thieves and robbers ; referring not to the prophets, but those, like the scribes and Pharisees, who pretended to be the religious guides of the people. Through their teaching many doubtless had been led astray ; unstable souls were beguiled, and self-deceivers were confirmed in their false security : " but the sheep heard them not." By a divine instinct they turned away from the instruction which causeth to err. Under every dispensation He was pointed out as the exclusive way of salvation ; for " to him gave all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him should receive remission of sins." Their testimony, as a matter of course, was in some measure obscure ; but now, in language free from all ambiguity, the important announcement is made, " I am the door : by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

But we have now to do more especially with the other title, that of shepherd. Being an official designation, the epithet " good" which is here affixed to it, must be understood as indicating, not personal excellence, although it was found in the Lord Jesus in the highest perfection ; but his qualifications for that important function, and the manner in which its duties were discharged by him. A good king is one who properly rules his subjects, and under whose sway they enjoy the blessings of security, order, peace, liberty, prosperity. A good physician is one who has great skill in his profession, and who is successful in healing the various maladies to which the

children of men are exposed. So a good shepherd is one who cares for the sheep, protecting them from danger, and leaving nothing undone that can promote their welfare. Now that Jesus is pre-eminently such in the relation he bears to his people, is fully shown by the various particulars which are specified in the following verses. Of such the first is,

1. The great object he had in view. "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Joseph could say to his brethren, "God did send me before you to preserve life;" but the Saviour's mission had reference to a far higher end, even to impart life. Nor was that all, for he imparts it superabundantly, or "over and above," which is the literal rendering. To the spiritual existence which he confers and secures, there is added, in the utmost plenitude, whatever is necessary for its support. Sheep can live where there is but little to feed upon; but on stunted and withered herbage, for them to thrive is impossible. Now our Shepherd has made ample provision for his people; he makes them to lie down, not in dry stubble, but in green pastures, where there is the richest and most luxuriant supply. "For if by one man's offence," says the apostle, "death reigned by one; much more they which receive *abundance of grace*, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." And while it is a life distinguished by inexhaustible fulness, it has also the glorious property of being unending in its duration. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." In this precious promise what a view is given of the dignity of Christ on the one hand, and of the security of his people on the other. "The gift of God is eternal life;" but here Jesus declares that

it is bestowed by him, and therefore he must be divine. Nor is this the only place where he claims that high prerogative. In the messages he sent to the seven churches, it is done in such a variety of forms, and with such magnificent expressions, which are more than sufficient, it might be supposed, to confound those who only consult, as we have already observed, to cast him down from his excellency. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." But with the dignity of Christ is set forth the security and blessedness of his people. The life he gives his sheep is eternal life; and thus there is a sense in which the humblest believer can borrow, without presumption, those majestic words—"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore."

2. The method by which this object was accomplished. To confer benefits, especially if they are of great value, is a signal proof of kindness; but the proof is far stronger and more impressive when the favours bestowed have cost the benefactor much toil, self-denial, and suffering. Now the life which the Saviour gives could only be secured by the sacrifice of his own; and that sacrifice he cheerfully made. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." The terrors of death, of death in its most appalling aspect, did not deter him from saying, "If ye seek me, let these go their way." Our debt was exacted of him; and to meet the inexorable requirements to which he became liable as our Surety, he made his soul an offering for sin. The dread mandate was uttered, "Awake, O sword against my shepherd, and against the man that is my

fellow, saith the Lord of hosts." Thus smitten of God, he gave his life a ransom, and purchased his people with his own blood.

"Man dead in sins and lost,
Atonement for himself, or offering meet,
Hath none to bring. Behold me then ;
Me for him ; life for life I offer.
On me let thine anger fall ; account me man :
I for his sake will leave thy bosom,
And this glory freely put off. On me
Let death wreak all his rage."

Must he not then be a good shepherd, since he thus, of his own accord, gave his life for the sheep !

3. The feelings by which he was actuated in all he did and endured. The whole was prompted by the warm affection he felt for his people, an affection which difficulties and dangers, far from lessening, only increased in intensity. Hence the contrast that is here presented. "But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth : and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep." By the hireling spoken of in these words is meant, not one who receives hire, but who works merely for the sake of hire ; and if influenced by no higher consideration, he is not likely to expose himself to perils and privations in the discharge of his duty. No hireling was Jacob when in the service of his father-in-law, for he could say, "This twenty years have I been with thee ; thy ewes and thy she-goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee ; I bore the loss of it ; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was ; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night ; and my sleep departed from mine eyes." No hireling

as David again, as the language in which he addressed Saul clearly proves. "And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God." But if they were animated by such a spirit, what shall we say of the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, who not only risked his life, but made an actual surrender of it? This was proof indeed, a proof all proof beyond, of matchless love and unbounded compassion.

The deep interest which the Saviour takes in the welfare of his people, is connected with, and arises in no small measure from, the intimate knowledge he has of them. "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." He is acquainted with all their wants, all their anxieties and perplexities, all their trials and temptations; and he sympathises with them, for in their manifold afflictions, he is afflicted. In stating how fully acquainted he is with them, he employs a comparison which could scarcely have entered any finite imagination; and if it had entered, he must have been a bold, if not an impious man, who would have dared to utter it. "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the father;" or rather, as the best expositors construe the words, "Even as the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father." On another occasion he declared, "As the Father loveth me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love." Thus in setting forth his knowledge and affection, he had to draw illustrations from a quarter so ineffably, so mysteriously exalted; inasmuch as nothing that apper-

tains to human or even angelic beings, furnished an appropriate symbol of the one or the other.

4. The comprehensive range embraced by his sympathy and compassion. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." When he uttered these words, his followers were few in number; they were only "a little flock," according to his own expression. But it was not always to continue so; the little one was to become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation. That such would be the case was to him a matter of no doubtful disputation; and hence he here speaks of the enlargement of his church in no faltering tone, although he well knew the difficulties which his infant cause would have to encounter. But in spite of every hostile influence, whether of earth or hell, he calmly and confidently looks forward to the period when many wanderers from many lands would be brought into his fold. "Them also I *must* bring;" it is a consummation which the counsels of eternity have settled, and which the pages of prophecy through successive generations have declared; and my own honour, as well as my Father's glory, are involved in seeing it secured.

Not only is his flock to be a large, but also an united one. "And there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." The boundaries of the church have been already greatly extended, and what has been done hitherto may be regarded as a sufficient pledge that the work will continue to advance until all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. But the unity of the church has been as yet by no means in proportion to its growth. It is still a divided body, and as long as it continues such, our Lord's prediction will be unfulfilled, and his last prayer, "that they all may be one," will remain unanswered. The arrival of the happy period when the whole Christian community will answer to the

description here given, is what should be devoutly and earnestly longed for ; and unless it is our heart's desire and constant prayer, we cannot have much sympathy with the Saviour in his feelings and designs. "Will any one," it has been asked, "who surveys the distinctions of the Christian church, who sees the parties into which it is split, the virulence by which they are actuated, the angry controversies they maintain, the discredit they bring upon Christianity, the force they give to infidel objections, the gratification they afford to demons, the obstructions they throw in the way of the world's conversion, not desire the union of the church? Can any person pretend to the Christian character, with the paralysis of such a cold and deadly indifference at his heart? What! survey the divided state of that church with indifference, for which Christ gave his tears, his prayers, his blood, his life, to make it one, and yet pretend to piety! To see that church a battle-field, which should be a sheep-fold ; and those members of it, which should be feeding together as lambs, fighting with each other as gladiators, and shed no tears for its divisions, cherish no desires for its union! Is the church, which is the centre of God's cares and counsels, the purchase of Christ's blood, no more to us than this? Had we seen even the seamless garment which once covered the sacred person of the Saviour rent and torn by violence, we could not have looked on the mutilated robe without emotion ; and shall we see his spiritual body torn by faction, and disfigured by bigotry, and yet be indifferent to the melancholy spectacle?"

5. The divine approbation he secured. "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." O how amazing must God's love to us be, that he loved his

Son the more on account of what he did to procure our redemption ! Although he was beloved from all eternity with an ineffable affection, yet he received additional expressions of the divine complacency in consequence of his dying in our stead. And especially so because he gave himself for us unconstrained, his offering being pre-eminently a voluntary offering. He had full power over his own life, what cannot be said of any created being ; and the manner in which he was pleased to exercise that power was, not for his own ease and security, but for our inconceivable and everlasting advantage.

Did his Father love him because he laid down his life, and should we not love him for the same reason ? If we withhold our hearts from him after all he has done for us men and for our salvation, we shall be guilty of the most monstrous ingratitude, and deserve the execrations of the whole intelligent universe. But with those who, in the language of a realizing and appropriating faith, can say, " He loved me, and gave himself for me," he cannot fail to be regarded as the object of their supreme affection. Such can join in singing,

" To me that bleeding love of his,
Shall ever precious be ;
Whatever he to others is,
He's all in all to me."

THE NEEDFUL CAUTION.

TAKE HEED THAT YE DESPISE NOT ONE OF THESE LITTLE ONES ; FOR I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT IN HEAVEN THEIR ANGELS DO ALWAYS BEHOLD THE FACE OF MY FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN. FOR THE SON OF MAN IS COME TO SAVE THAT WHICH WAS LOST. NOW THINK YE ? IF A MAN HAVE AN HUNDRED SHEEP, AND ONE OF THEM BE GONE ASTRAY, &c.—Mat. xviii. 10-14.

THESE words are a continuation of what Jesus had been stating in the preceding verses. They contain—

I. A NEEDFUL CAUTION.—“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones ; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”

1. To despise them is fearfully dangerous. “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” God threatened to blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven ; and why ? Because he smote those that were feeble among the children of Israel.

2. The interest taken in them by the highest intelligences should prevent us from thinking lightly of them. They are ministered to by those glorious beings who stand in the immediate presence of the eternal King, and who receive continually the most signal tokens of his divine favour.

3. The high destiny which awaits them. The Jews were accustomed to call a man’s disembodied spirit “his angel,” which they thought might re-appear and visit the earth. Thus the disciples said concerning Peter after his liberation from prison, “It is his angel,” supposing that he had been put to death. According to

this view the words set forth the personal blessedness of the Saviour's disciples in a future state. When they die God takes them to himself, and their spirits are admitted to all the joys and honours of the beatific vision.

II. A BLESSED ANNOUNCEMENT.—“For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.” This may be regarded either as a proof that they will inherit immortal life and glory, or it is intended to meet an objection that might arise as to such creatures being too worthless and insignificant for the ministration and guardianship of the celestial hosts; for angels might well regard it as a distinguished privilege to be permitted to wait upon those whom their great Lord and Master came to rescue and redeem. In itself the statement embraces three particulars.

1. The title assumed. The Son of man was the Saviour's favourite designation, and he very rarely used any other when speaking of himself. He loved to identify himself with us, and was not ashamed to call us brethren.

2. The act declared. He came not merely to improve or ameliorate our condition, but to save us. A drunkard made sober, a thief made honest, a liar made truthful—such changes are good as far as they go, and it is gratifying to see them. But the object which led the Lord Jesus to quit his heavenly throne, and visit this lower world, was far more important than any outward reformation. “He will come and save you,” was the substance of the prophetic intimations which went before concerning him; and when he appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh, all his thoughts and feelings, all his labours and sufferings, had constant reference to this great and glorious design.

3. The miserable objects regarded. Fallen man is lost in every sense, but here the word denotes that he is completely ruined and undone. “O Israel thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help found.”

III. A FAMILIAR COMPARISON.—“How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.” These words may be considered—

1. In their literal signification. It is a principle of human nature that the recovery of anything which has been lost, though of comparatively little worth, affords greater joy than the secure possession of what is far more valuable. The difference between one sheep and ninety-nine is very great; yet the restoration of the single wanderer was a source of more intense satisfaction and delight to the shepherd than was the safety of all the rest of his flock.

2. In their spiritual allusion. It is probable that the angelic legions are intended by those whom the good Shepherd had left safe in the fold, when he came into our world to seek and to save lost sinners.

IV. AN ENCOURAGING INFERENCE.—“Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.” We see here—

1. The harmony that existed between the mission of Christ and the purposes of the eternal Father. He and his Father are one; not only one in nature, but in the feelings by which they are actuated, and the objects at which they aim.

2. If it is not the will of God that the most despised and insignificant believers should perish, their salvation is a matter of absolute certainty. “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

AND HE SAID ALSO UNTO HIS DISCIPLES, THERE WAS A CERTAIN RICH MAN, WHICH HAD A STEWARD; AND THE SAME WAS ACCUSED UNTO HIM THAT HE HAD WASTED HIS GOODS. AND HE CALLED HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, HOW IS IT THAT I HEAR THIS OF THEE? GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF THY STEWARDSHIP; FOR THOU MAYEST BE NO LONGER STEWARD. THEN THE STEWARD SAID WITHIN HIMSELF, WHAT SHALL I DO? FOR MY LORD TAKETH AWAY FROM ME THE STEWARDSHIP: I CANNOT DIG: TO BEG I AM ASHAMED. I AM RESOLVED WHAT TO DO, THAT WHEN I AM PUT OUT OF THE STEWARDSHIP, THEY MAY RECEIVE ME INTO THEIR HOUSES. SO HE CALLED EVERY ONE OF HIS LORD'S DEBTORS UNTO HIM, &c.—Luke xvi. 1-9.

IN the previous chapter we find the Saviour discoursing to the scribes and Pharisees, in order to justify his conduct against the charges they had brought against him. Here he is speaking to another class, namely, his own disciples. By them we are not to understand the apostles, for what follows is by no means applicable to their circumstances. One of the most prominent topics insisted upon is the right use of riches; but as they were poor, and had abandoned their earthly callings, any instructions to them on that subject would be useless. As, however, not a few of the publicans had become his followers, and as some of them, like Zaccheus, had amassed considerable wealth, it is most probable that they were the disciples to whom this parable was addressed. Their chief danger arose from dishonesty on the one hand, and covetousness on the other; and therefore the case which is here presented would be to them peculiarly appropriate. He espoused their cause when all the more respectable among his countrymen frowned upon them, and kept aloof from holding any intercourse with them: but this did not prevent him

from warning them against the temptations to which they were exposed, nor from urging those duties upon them which they were required to discharge.

The parable which he now delivered possesses certain peculiarities, and is generally supposed to involve some rather formidable difficulties. They are, however, more apparent than real, and will be found to disappear in a great measure on a careful consideration of its nature and design. We shall first notice—

I. THE OFFICE WHICH THE INDIVIDUAL HERE SPOKE OF SUSTAINED.—It was that of a steward, being employed as such by a certain rich man. Those who acted in that capacity, especially in ancient times, had the entire management of their master's affairs, and were thus invested with great power as well as great responsibility. Such was Eliezar in the family of Abraham, of whom it is said, "that all the goods of his master were in his hand, and that he ruled over all that he had." Such also was Joseph in the house of Potiphar. "And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand, and he knew not aught he had, save the bread which he did eat." These instances are sufficient to give us a general idea of the position which this person occupied.

Any one holding such a situation would, among other temptations, be in danger of forgetting himself. The habit of giving peremptory orders, and directing everything according to his own pleasure, might insensibly induce a deceptive feeling, and lead him to regard the property that was under his control as his own. And are not we liable to forget and deceive ourselves in a similar way? At best we are but stewards, and yet how prone are we to speak of *our* estates and possessions, *our* fruits and goods. But they are not ours; they belong to Him who declares, "The gold is mine, and the silver is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills."

A beggar on one occasion asked alms of a lady of high

rank and eminent piety. She gave him sixpence, saying, "That is more than ever God gave me." "Oh," said the poor man, "say not so, madam, for you have great wealth, and God gave you all." "No," she replied, "I speak the truth; God hath not *given*, but *lent* me what I have, that I might bestow it on such as you. I am only my Lord's steward, and must answer for all I have to him." Well would it be for us to cherish the same sentiment, and act upon it continually. But concerning the steward before us, we have secondly,

II. THE SERIOUS CHARGE WHICH WAS BROUGHT AGAINST HIM.—"There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods." In reference to this charge we notice—

1. Its nature. What was he guilty of? Was it improvidence, or dishonesty, or both? The words "wasted his goods," in themselves, involve nothing more than negligence or extravagance; and for a steward, who is especially required to be diligent and careful in looking after his master's interests, even this would be no trifling matter. At the same time there is in what follows, sufficient to render it certain that he had defrauded his employer. It is true that he did not enrich himself by what he had taken, for he had laid by nothing, being altogether unprovided for the future. It seems, then, that he must have lived in an extravagant and reckless manner, and thus wasted all he had of his own, as well as that which did not belong to him.

Against the children of men, in the relation they sustain to the Most High, both of these charges can be brought. The question, "Will a man rob God?" is a very startling one; so much so, that we might be disposed to say, It cannot possibly be. But in his word he brings the solemn accusation against us; an accusation the truth of which none will be disposed to deny, except those who are ignorant of their true character, and who

set at nought his claims as the moral Governor of the universe. The charge that we have been remiss in the improvement of the various trusts committed to us, is still more evident. Who is not compelled to acknowledge that many precious opportunities have been misimproved by them, and that they have been far less diligent, as stewards of the divine Proprietor, than they ought?

2. The consequences to which it led. The steward was—

(1.) Summoned to his master's presence. "And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee?" Much depends upon the tone in which words are uttered; but this question, as it is here given, seems to be more kind and gentle, than harsh and indignant. Violent expressions are certainly not the best vehicle of censure; that reproof pierces the deepest, and is most likely to be effectual, which is clothed in mild and tender accents. According to the old saying, we should "rebuke with soft words, and hard arguments." But the language now addressed to this steward, notwithstanding its gentleness, is not without some degree of severity; indeed its severity arises from its gentleness. "How is it that I hear this of *thee*?" Thee, whom I have trusted with so much, and in whom I have placed such full confidence. I am grieved, surprised, astounded.

(2.) He was dismissed from his master's service. "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." These words appear to indicate that the resolution was acted upon at once; but it is probable that it was only conditional. Such is the view taken by Stier, who says, "It is not his lord's purpose to dismiss him, and make the account demanded a surrender of his office. This has been gratuitously inferred, and an impropriety argued from it, in his lord's removing the steward on the evidence of a secret information, without any investigation into the matter. He merely

says, Lay before me thy accounts, and if they confirm what I have heard, then thou shalt no longer be my steward." It is not unlikely that this is the correct interpretation; but whether the decision was absolute or contingent, the steward was fully aware that his situation was lost, and that the proposed examination, far from clearing his character, would only corroborate his guilt.

The time is rapidly approaching when the words, "Give an account of thy stewardship," will be addressed to each of us. It is therefore of the last importance that we should live under a deep sense of our accountability, and in constant anticipation of the great day of final reckoning. This will be our highest wisdom now, as it will be our highest happiness hereafter to be able to give in our account with joy, and not with grief. Most appropriate then is the prayer, and most necessary that we should adopt it as our own:—

"Arm me with jealous care,
As in thy sight to live;
And O thy servant, Lord, prepare
A strict account to give."

III. THE ARTFUL POLICY WHICH THIS STEWARD ADOPTED.
—"Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses." We are here shown—

1. The anxious concern evinced by him. His sin had found him out, as it will, sooner or later, find out all who forsake the paths of rectitude. He is therefore greatly distressed; not because he had done wrong, not because he had betrayed the important trust committed to him, not because of the ingratitude with which he had requited the indulgence and confidence of his kind

master. No sense whatever does he appear to have had of the baseness of his conduct; what troubled him was of a different kind altogether. His anxiety was prompted by the most intense selfishness; for he is only concerned about what would become of him, and what steps he should take in his present emergency.

2. The alternatives which suggested themselves as the result of his musings. They were three, namely, labour, begging, cheating. To dig is to be regarded as a proverbial expression for any sort of menial toil; and this was the first expedient that presented itself to his mind. It was, however, at once abandoned as impracticable. He had not been accustomed to, he was altogether unfit for, every description of manual labour. Others might work hard, and earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, but he could not stand it; and therefore the idea was dismissed in the most peremptory manner. After digging came the question of begging, but the result was the same. In the former case his delicate habits, and, in all likelihood, his indolence, stood in the way; in the latter, his pride. "I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed." Ashamed to beg he ought to have been, if he was able to work; but there are more disgraceful things even than begging, as we are here shown. Better be a common beggar—and honest, than occupy the highest rank, and violate the precepts of rectitude in the least degree. But this steward thought otherwise, and the scheme he devised showed that he had no scruples about stooping to what was most base and disreputable, provided his own ends could be thereby secured.

3. The promptitude with which he carried his purpose into execution. The question he had asked himself was, "What shall I do?" and it seems that he was not long in coming to a decision. Now with many to decide is one thing, and to act is another thing; here, however, we are shown that no sooner was the plan adopted than it was reduced to practice. "I am resolved what to do,

that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses." An idea, as if he had said, has just struck me; I now see my way out of the difficulties by which I am surrounded; it is a contrivance that cannot fail to answer most admirably. But there is not a moment to be lost; I must set to work this very instant, for the least delay may upset the whole arrangement. "So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down *quickly*, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore." Thus we are not even informed of his method of extrication until we see it actually accomplished. His object was to lay these debtors under personal obligations to himself, and by reducing the amount of their liabilities—in the case of the first one-half, and of the other one-fifth—he felt assured that they could not refuse to show kindness towards him in return. After making them his friends in this manner, he intended to live upon their bounty, going from house to house as long as he lived, and so avail himself to the utmost extent of that hospitality for which the inhabitants of Eastern countries are so distinguished.

IV. THE UNEXPECTED COMMENDATION HE RECEIVED.—
"And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."

1. By whom he was commended. It is evident that the master of the steward is meant, and not the Lord Jesus. This consideration goes far to rebut the charge adduced by infidels, both ancient and modern, that he is here sanctioning the most flagrant dishonesty. It may, it is true, be still contended, that though the reference

be to the steward's lord, yet that Christ by setting forth this person as a pattern, virtually joins with the master in eulogising what the servant had done. That the Saviour holds him up as an example is undeniable; it was, however, not on account of his fraud, but, as we shall see, for other and very different reasons. Far from us be the thought that He, who is the holy one and the just, who loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity, should lend his sanction, either directly or indirectly, to any infringement of that divine law which he came to fulfil, a law which forbids every approach to injustice, and denounces even the very appearance of evil.

"Men will praise thee," it is said, "when thou doest well to thyself." A person who is mindful of his own interests is likely to be extolled by the world; nor, in general, are its plaudits withheld, should the means employed not be altogether legitimate. If this steward, therefore, had been commended by his neighbours and acquaintances, there would be nothing strange in the circumstance; it would only show the absence of a high state of moral feeling among them. But in the present case the peculiarity is, that the master was a great sufferer; and it is a rare thing indeed for any one to praise another, when he is himself the victim which is taken in by the party that is so highly applauded. Some have supposed that the language here employed is to be regarded as ironical, and that when thus viewed all difficulty is removed. But it is by no means easy to perceive how an ironical construction harmonizes with the obvious scope of the parable. To turn the commendation into irony would not only lessen the force of the illustration, but defeat the main object for which the whole discourse was delivered.

2. Why he was commended. It was because "he had done wisely," or prudently. Solomon says, "a prudent man foreseeth the evil;" and this steward not only foresaw it, but prepared for it: and the way

in which he did so evinced no ordinary sagacity. Now for this he is praised, and to such praise he is clearly entitled. A warrior, while acting the part of a traitor against his king and country, may display some of the highest qualities of a hero; a courage which nothing could daunt, and an energy which never flagged for a single moment. He is guilty of treason it is true, but notwithstanding that, his bravery calls forth our admiration. So with this steward; his dishonesty is to be condemned, but his forethought, his shrewdness, his promptitude, deserve to be applauded.

In the things in which he excelled, the great mass of religious professors are sadly deficient. Hence the comparison that is here drawn, and the censure which is here pronounced. "For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The steward was only concerned about his temporal well-being; but he, and the class whom he represents, in seeking the objects which they are anxious to secure, display certain qualities which are seldom found in those who aspire after heavenly realities. As far as the east is from the west, so far are the men of this world from the possession and manifestation of true wisdom, when the end they have in view is considered, for "they spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not." But choosing an end is one thing, while the singleness of aim, and untiring industry evinced in pursuing it, is another thing. "If we put out of sight," says an eloquent writer, "the comparative worthlessness and insignificance of the objects which are sought, there is nothing more interesting or imposing than the spectacle of a man wholly given up to the making of money or the gaining of distinction; he is just an exhibition of the powers of the body and the capacities of the mind, combining together and coming forth in their concentrated strength; and when we look upon him rising up early,

and late taking rest, eating the bread of carefulness, and making light of toil and setting at nought hardships, and enduring the greatest privations; borne down it may be by an inrush of adverse events, but again uplifting himself, as though there were youth in the grey hairs of his head, and elasticity in the overwrought limbs. Never do we more clearly perceive what our nature even in its wrecked and ruined state is, than when we behold a man bearing up against difficulties and disasters, and pursuing with so unswerving a determination the object to which he hath given his affections, that he would cross the ocean, and scale mountains, and dive into caverns, and flinch not one hair's breadth from pursuing that object. It is a magnificent thing that human nature, in spite of all its weakness and all its mortality, should be capable of being braced up to an invincible constancy and pertinacity, so that an end being proposed which fixes the affections, it is not to be daunted by danger, and is not to be laughed out of countenance by reproach or reviling. We say this is a magnificent thing, but we say at the same time that it is a degrading thing; for the instances are comparatively rare in which human nature has thus sprung up with the performance of the duties of religion, whereas they are numerous where the gold dust has to be gathered and the coronet to be gained."

V. THE IMPORTANT LESSON WHICH THE CASE OF THIS STEWARD ENFORCES.—"And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

1. The exhortation which is here addressed. It refers to wealth, which is called the mammon of unrighteousness. The latter epithet is used to indicate that it is often unrighteously procured, and often unrighteously applied. It is also in its nature intrinsically deceitful, promising much that it never performs, and thus those

who trust in it are always, sooner or later, disappointed. And yet it is possible for us to make to ourselves friends of it, or rather by means of it. This is what the steward did: he turned it to his own account, and through it secured the friendship of those who were able to render to him the succour he required. The mammon that he employed was in a special sense that of unrighteousness, as it was not his own: but it answered his purpose, and that was all he cared for. He laid the debtors under obligations to him: and partly from gratitude, and partly to save themselves from exposure, they could not refuse to receive him into their houses. Now as he made the unrighteous mammon subservient to his temporal interests, we are called upon to make it subservient to our spiritual interests. A snare it has been, and still is, to thousands: and yet we are shown in these words that it may be made a help, and not a hindrance, in the great work of preparation for the kingdom of heaven.

2. The consideration by which it is enforced. "That, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." There are various classes by whom the believer will be welcomed into the mansions of bliss. First and foremost of all there is the Lord Jesus, who is gone to prepare a place for his people, and who has expressly declared that he will *receive* them unto himself, that where he is there they may be also. With his ravishing smile will the ransomed spirit be greeted, as it enters in through the gates into the city: and with his gracious lips will the words be uttered, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." The diadem will be placed by his own hands upon our brow: and then shall we feel, as we never felt before, how true is the remark of the sainted Baxter, "that this will be our everlasting admiration, that so rich a crown should be placed on the head of so vile a sinner." There will be also the angelic hosts,

those blessed beings who are appointed to minister unto the heirs of salvation. If they rejoiced when the lost sheep was gathered into the fold of the church on earth, they are not likely to be uninterested spectators when he enters the church above. And so with departed saints. They will most assuredly be ready to hail with transporting gladness every accession to their ranks. Whoever will be waiting on the other side of Jordan, to "welcome travellers home," our Christian brethren who are gone before us will certainly be of their number.

It is the latter class that seems to be alluded to in the passage before us; but the reference is somewhat special. It is true that this verse has been explained in different ways, but the following paraphrase gives the most natural interpretation: "Procure to yourselves real friends by the beneficent use, especially in succours to the pious poor, of that wealth which is so often unrighteously acquired, retained, or expended: that, when ye go hence, those devout and grateful friends may recognise and greet you in the everlasting habitations of the blest." Such is the Christian devotedness of some that they have been instrumental in turning many to righteousness, or lending a helping hand to those who, amid many difficulties and discouragements, were toiling Zion-ward; they have so employed the talents committed to them, especially the worldly substance with which they have been blessed, as to render them public benefactors in their day and generation. And when the time of their departure is come, those who were so much indebted to them on earth, and who were previously called away, will meet them on their arrival, saying, Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; to us thou wert a friend in need, and we give thee a cordial welcome home.

A similar sentiment is contained in those beautiful words, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may

rest from their labours; *and their works do follow them.*" That is, the products of their spiritual toil, in the form of souls awakened, instructed, edified, succoured, by their instrumentality, continue to follow them to their celestial abode, long after they themselves have left this lower world. But in the case before us, the works of faith and labours of love, as embodied in those who were the recipients thereof, precede instead of coming after. "Some men's sins," says the apostle, "are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid:" they will not always remain either unrecognised or unrewarded.

We would say in conclusion, let us seek, above all things, to be wise in regard to those interests which are spiritual and eternal. As our own salvation has the first claims upon our attention, we should give all diligence to make our calling and election sure. The spirit with which the children of this world pursue earthly objects, let us emulate in our search after durable riches and righteousness. Then, being blessed ourselves, let us endeavour to become a blessing to others. The luxury of doing good is far from being an unmeaning expression; there is in the very act a satisfaction and enjoyment which words cannot express. And if it be so now, how rich will we taste the luxury to be, when we and the persons we have benefited shall meet in yonder everlasting habitations! Then those who have sown and those who have reaped will rejoice together, and gather fruit unto life eternal.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE.

AGAIN, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO TREASURE HID IN A FIELD; THE WHICH WHEN A MAN HATH FOUND, HE HIDETH, AND FOR JOY THEREOF GOETH AND SELLETH ALL THAT HE HATH, AND BUYETH THAT FIELD.—Matt. xiii. 44.

I. WHAT THIS MAN FOUND.—The word “treasure” signifies anything valuable, and here refers either to concealed property, or a mine of some precious metal. It is often applied to the gospel, as when the apostle says, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” At present we shall regard it as setting forth, not so much the gospel in itself, as that which it contains and reveals, namely, salvation. The value of this treasure will appear if we consider—

1. From what it delivers us. It is from sin here, and from its awful consequences hereafter.

2. With what it enriches us. All spiritual blessings on earth, and eternal glory in heaven.

II. How HE DISCOVERED IT.—It was unexpectedly, as he was not looking for it at the time. The ordinary rule is, “Seek, and ye shall find;” and those who seek with the greatest earnestness and diligence are the most likely to be successful. “If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.” But while such is the general method, it is not to be forgotten that God is a sovereign, and delights to glorify his free grace and mercy. Something similar to the case before us—

1. Has been realised in the happy experience of many. When Saul went to look after the strayed asses of his father, he found a kingdom; for before he returned home he was anointed by Samuel as the king of Israel. His namesake of Tarsus, in after ages, found what was unspeakably more important when on his way to Damascus; and the one treasure was as unlooked for as the other.

2. There are divine assurances which warrant such an expectation. The words of the prophet, which are quoted by Paul, may be referred to as a striking instance: "But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me."

III. THE COURSE HE PURSUED IN REFERENCE TO IT.

1. He showed that he appreciated its worth. Solomon speaks of "a price in the hands of a fool," but not knowing the value of it, it is lightly esteemed. With this man it was otherwise: he perceived at once the good fortune that had befallen him, and so he carefully concealed what he had discovered, lest he should lose his spoil.

2. He felt a strong desire to become legally possessed of it. For this purpose he went and bought the field, although to enable him to do so, he had to sell all that he previously possessed. And what says the apostle? "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him."

3. The feeling by which he was actuated. To part with the whole of his property was a serious matter, and he might have hesitated before running such a risk; for what if the treasure should prove to be of less value than he anticipated? But far from indulging in such

thoughts, he joyfully sold everything, and was fully assured that he acted wisely in so doing.

Thus should we act in reference to the salvation of our souls. No sacrifice can be too great to secure so inestimable a blessing; and the spirit in which the sacrifice should be made is that of the early believers, who were thus addressed: "For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance."

THE PRODIGAL SON.

AND HE SAID, A CERTAIN MAN HAD TWO SONS : AND THE YOUNGER OF THEM SAID TO HIS FATHER, FATHER, GIVE ME THE PORTION OF GOODS THAT FALLETH TO ME. AND HE DIVIDED UNTO THEM HIS LIVING. AND NOT MANY DAYS AFTER THE YOUNGER SON GATHERED ALL TOGETHER, AND TOOK HIS JOURNEY INTO A FAR COUNTRY, AND THERE WASTED HIS SUBSTANCE WITH RIOTOUS LIVING. AND WHEN HE HAD SPENT ALL, THERE AROSE A MIGHTY FAMINE IN THAT LAND, &c.—Luke xv. 11-32.

To compare spiritual things with spiritual is an important exercise, and absolutely necessary to a right understanding of the word of truth. We are, however, tempted occasionally to institute such a comparison for the purpose, not of getting a clearer insight into one portion in the relation it bears to another, but in order to express our admiration of one portion above another. This may not be improper, for the fact that all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and profitable for securing the various ends contemplated, does not imply that every part is equally weighty, equally instructive, or equally interesting.

By universal consent this parable has been regarded as one of the most precious which the great Teacher ever delivered. “If we were allowed,” says Stier, “to introduce here the distinctions applicable to human things, we might term this the crown and pearl of all our Lord’s parables. How many words would it require to express the feelings of reverent astonishment with which we ever contemplate and study it! How simple, yet how profound; how transparently artless as a chapter of human life, and yet how full of mystery as a revelation of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; how perfectly natural is the picture as a whole,

and yet how full of significance down to the slightest and minutest features and touches; how eternally rivetted on the memory are the words, how inexhaustibly to be explored their ever new evolutions of meaning; with what dramatic life is all related, so that every fresh clause suggests in itself a whole history, which one is involuntarily constrained to pursue for himself; and, again, with what force does every word arrest the conscience, and point to the application of the whole; in short, to sum all in one word, how divinely-human is this parable of the God-man!"

Let us proceed then to glance at some of its more prominent features. Before doing so, we merely remark that it does not seem to contain any allusion whatever to the Jews in relation to the Gentiles, as many have supposed. Whether we regard the contents of the parable, or the occasion on which it was spoken, it is evident that the literal reference is to the Pharisees and scribes on the one hand, and to the publicans and sinners on the other; the latter being represented by the younger son, who occupies the most conspicuous part of the narrative. Thus, in tracing the prodigal's career, while the lessons it suggests concern sinners generally, yet they apply more especially to those whose lives have been outwardly immoral and profane. We shall notice—

I. THE FOOLISH COURSE HE PURSUED.—In connection therewith, three things are set forth.

1. His demand. "A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living." To us there appears an unbecoming boldness in this requirement, and likewise a want of prudence on the part of the father in granting it so readily. We must, however, bear in mind that the customs of the East were different from ours, in this as well as many other matters. It seems that children can there claim their portion during the father's life; and

thus in the present case, even though he had been aware of the profligate inclinations of his son, this father could not legally refuse to comply with his request.

The demand was doubtless prompted by a desire to be freed from those restraints which exist more or less in every well-regulated family. The youth wished to be his own master; he regarded full liberty and independence as indispensable to his happiness. His father's regulations were too strict, and the home of his youth was too quiet and dull for his buoyant spirits. He must be a man; be off, and see the world, and live as he listed. Now, it is just so with sinners in reference to the authority of the Most High. They look upon his laws as being too rigorous, his commands as too exacting. Their feeling is that he requires them to do more than they ought, and also, to give up more than they ought. The consequence is that they spurn his authority, and walk in the ways of their own hearts, and in the sight of their own eyes, as it was in the case before us.

2. His departure. We may easily suppose that he never spent so truly delicious a moment as that in which his entire property was placed in his own hands; and, his fondest wish being thus gratified, he prepares at once for the intended journey. "And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living." If he felt a slight pang when the time of separation came, it was only for a moment; or the probability is that the bright visions to which he looked forward enabled him to pronounce the last farewell with firmness, and that the bitterness of parting was altogether absorbed in the fulness of his joy. But at length the journey is completed, the region so ardently desired is reached, and now he can do as he pleases, unquestioned and uncontrolled. If he had purposed to engage in some traffic, or lay out his capital in any profitable investment, such a design appears to have

been totally abandoned ; on the contrary, he gave himself up to sensual gratifications, and those of the lowest kind. " He wasted his substance with riotous living ;" he gave full swing to his passions, and his career was one of reckless dissipation, a career alike destructive to his person and property, to his body and soul. Alas ! how many young men resemble him in the present day, who make carnal pleasure their god, who live in a perpetual whirl, and who seem to think that the great end and object of their being is to feast and make merry.

3. His distress. " And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land ; and he began to be in want." Such was the condition to which he was now reduced. But where, it may be asked, are his gay companions with whom he had been revelling ? Surely they are ready to relieve him in his present emergency ? Not they : though they had assisted to waste his property, though they had eaten of his bread and drank of his cup, and though they had fawned and flattered while his wealth lasted ; but no sooner was it gone, than they were gone. Like swallows, they hovered around him in the summer of prosperity, but on the first indications that the wintry blasts of adversity were approaching, they disappeared, leaving him to pine in poverty and destitution.

Having then no money and no friends, he was compelled to look out for some employment, and we are told what kind of a situation he obtained. " And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country ; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." This was low life indeed. It is well known that swine were to the Jews of all animals the most detestable, and no occupation to which a miserable wretch might be reduced was regarded so odious and abominable as that of a swine-herd. But disgraceful and loathsome as it was, by it he could not live. Pinched with hunger, he looked with envy on the very pigs he tended, and would fain

have filled his belly even with the coarse and nauseous husks which they were eating. But this seems to have been denied him ; he was not allowed to pick a morsel from the troughs out of which they were supplied ; and so he was doomed to see the swine fed, while he himself was starving.

What a contrast is here set before us ! Follow the unhappy youth from one scene to another. Go back to his home, and view him there. See him guarded by a father's watchful and tender care, waited upon from day to day, every attention paid to him, and all his wants liberally supplied. Then behold him leaving the paternal roof, and, flushed with glowing expectations, setting out on his journey for a distant land. There he sets up a splendid establishment ; he is determined to enjoy himself ; he becomes surrounded by lewd companions, and with them he spends his days and nights in dissipation and revelry. But look at him now : his property wasted, his establishment sold up, his boon companions vanished, and he in want. Abandoned, degraded, perishing, he has none to lament his fate, and none to alleviate his misery. Are we for witnessing the results which attend a course of disobedience and folly ? We have them here. These, O sinful pleasure, are thy trophies : these the rich rewards thou dost confer upon those who worship at thy shrine !

After all, it was well for the poor youth that uninterrupted and lasting prosperity did not attend him. It was well for him that he was brought to feel the inconveniences of poverty, the keen gnawings of hunger, the bitter pangs of disappointment, the crushing weight of obloquy and disgrace. We dare not say that it was well for him that he pursued so infatuated a career, but we can affirm that it was well for him that he was brought to endure its inevitable consequences. That he walked in "the way of transgressors" is to be deplored ; but that he found by painful experience that "the way

of transgressors is hard," should be a matter, not of regret, but of unfeigned rejoicing. Were it not for the hardships he endured, it is probable that the next part of his history, which we now proceed to consider, would be altogether different from the representation which is here given.

II. THE WISE RESOLUTION HE ADOPTED.—“And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants.” Concerning this resolution several things are set forth.

1. It indicated that reason had resumed her sway over his faculties and feelings. The remarkable and very emphatic expression, “when he came to himself,” plainly implies that he had been beside himself. And his whole history clearly corroborates the implication, for did he not act the part of a madman in pursuing such a course ? Now what the prodigal was, that every impenitent sinner is still ; he is in a state of spiritual insanity. Do not say that we are libelling human nature by so serious and humiliating a charge : for what saith the scriptures ? “The hearts of the sons of men are full of evil ;” but that is not all—“and madness is in their hearts.” Do they not act in direct opposition to all the dictates of true wisdom ? Do they not wage a perpetual warfare against their best interests, both as regards time and eternity ? Do they not despise those things which will endure when rolling years shall cease to move, and make the vain trifles of a day the exclusive objects of their desires and pursuits ? Do they not bid defiance to that glorious Being, with whom is terrible majesty, and whose very name causes even devils to fear and fly ? In a word, are they not resolutely bent upon their own destruction, being fully determined, in spite

of warnings innumerable, to perish for ever? If such be the case, surely madness must be in their hearts, and madness of the maddest kind. By many the devoted followers of Christ are pronounced to be beside themselves, as Festus declared concerning Paul. But were such, sworn enemies as they are to enthusiasm of every sort, only brought to see things in their true light, they would soon be convinced who were the madmen; not those who are anxiously concerned about their own salvation, and that of others, but they by whom salvation is lightly esteemed or contemptuously disregarded.

It is said of Nebuchadnezzar, in the fourth chapter of the book of Daniel, that at the end of a certain period, "he lifted up his eyes unto heaven, and his understanding returned to him." But what did he discover when thus restored to his right mind? He found that he had been banished from the society of his fellow-men; that he had been dwelling with the beasts of the field; that he had been eating grass like the oxen; that his hair was grown like the feathers of an eagle, and his nails like the claws of a bird. These were the horrid disclosures which were then made to him. So with the prodigal in like manner; he could truly say, "I lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned to me." And what did he find? He found himself starving, abandoned, undone, his fortune spent, all his prospects blasted, and with nothing to support and cheer his mind in his wretched condition. The same language can be adopted by every individual who has been convinced of his awful state in the sight of God. He can say, and it is an unspeakable mercy for him to be able to say, "I lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned to me." And if it be asked, what does he then find? we can say that he finds himself lost and ruined, an enemy to God by wicked works, under the curse and condemnation of a broken law, and exposed to the vengeance of eternal

fire. Let thine eyes, poor sinner, be opened, and thy understanding return to thee, and thou wilt realise that this is thy position; and without such a realization thou wilt never be brought earnestly to seek the Lord, and turn to him with full purpose of heart.

2. It was a resolution induced by calm and serious reflection. When the prodigal came to himself he began to think, a thing it is evident he had not previously done during his abode in this distant land. But now he began to call to remembrance the former days; he thought of his beloved home, and the happiness he had there enjoyed; he thought of his loving and indulgent father, and the anxiety and sorrow which he had caused him; and as he recalled the various scenes and circumstances connected with the peaceful abode which he had forsaken, his present destitution especially reminded him that there plenty still abounded, and that all its inmates had bread enough and to spare, while he was perishing with hunger. The contrast leads him even to envy the meanest domestics in his father's employ; he knew that they, from their liberal supplies, would be able to extend relief to the wretched and forlorn creature whom they used to call their young master.

Now it is a great matter to be brought like the prodigal to ponder and reflect. It is the rising beam of hope; it is the first faint dawn of spiritual day. A life of sin and folly excludes reflection; it causes it to be shunned as an unwelcome guest. But when the sinner is once awakened, he begins to consider his ways, and he is led especially to compare his own misery with the happiness of those who are rejoicing under the smiles of their Heavenly Father. A most favourable symptom is it to find any one indulging in such thoughts; for although serious reflection is not saving conversion, yet it is a most important and indispensable step towards it.

3. It was a resolution connected with deep penitence and self-abasement. "I will arise and go to my father, and

will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." "Ignorance," it has been said, "is the pedestal of pride; throw down the basis, and the figure falls." There are three things, a proper knowledge of which, cannot fail to clothe us with humility. A knowledge of our insignificance, a knowledge of our mortality, and, above all, a knowledge of our sinfulness. Whatever be the knowledge that "puffeth up," it is certainly neither of these, especially not the latter. A due sense of sin is sure to hide pride from man, and cover him with shame and confusion.

"If any man," says Paul, "think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing *as* he ought to know." It is in the word *as* that the point of the sentence evidently lies in reference to the general truth it embodies. And so in its application to our present subject. Whatever we know will be unavailing unless we know ourselves, and we cannot know ourselves aright unless our loftiness and haughtiness are laid low. Let a man know himself *as* he ought to know, and he is sure to be humbled even in dust and ashes.

Such was the case with the prodigal. "I have sinned," was his language; and it was not with him the unmeaning and unfelt language of mere custom or empty form. He had begun at least to understand its dread significance. His eye saw and his soul felt something of its awful meaning; for all that it involves infinitely transcends both human and angelic comprehension. "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee;" my earthly and my heavenly father have I alike insulted, and incurred the just displeasure of the one and the other. The consequence was that he felt his exceeding unworthiness. However high and haughty he might have been before; whatever consequential airs he might have originally assumed at home, or when, as

the dashing young gentleman, his property enabled him to live in high style in the distant land; but now this is the verdict he pronounces concerning himself,—“not worthy.” He was fully conscious that he deserved not the least favour, and that even on the score of kindred he could claim nothing, having forfeited every right to be called a son. Were it possible for him to be admitted as a hired servant; could he only be employed by his offended parent in the most menial capacity—that was all he ventured, all he dared to ask for.

4. It was a resolution that was carried into effect without delay. Had the thought of returning home entered his mind—as it probably did—before he came to himself, we can easily conceive how it would have been treated by him. Go back to my father’s house, in this wretched plight, covered as I am with rags and tatters! Go back, for the servants to stare and laugh at me, and for my brother to taunt and insult me! No, never; I will sooner die like a man of spirit, than live a life of indignity and disgrace. But his pride is now subdued, and he feels that for him to talk about submitting to a life of ignominy is ridiculous in the extreme. Am I not, he would say, degraded enough already? Am I not now a swine-herd, and is it possible for me to sink lower? “I will arise,” be the consequences what they may; remain here I must not, I dare not; longer hesitation will be inevitable destruction. Thus his mind was fully made up, and he at once started on his journey. “He arose, and came to his father.”

This was by far the most important step in his whole history, as it is in that of every saved sinner. But by many, alas! who have been brought to some measure of concern about their souls, it is a step that has never been taken. It is well to indulge in serious thoughts, well to be humbled on account of sin, and well to resolve to forsake the ways of evil, and return to Him from whom we have wandered; but the importance of these

things arises, not from what they are in themselves, but rather from what they lead to ; and that it is possible for them to issue in nothing decisive is too evident to be denied. "Slighted convictions," according to an old saying, "are death-bed companions ;" and the same can be said concerning broken resolutions. But woe to those who at such a season have their memories haunted by the one or the other ; while blessed are they who then enjoy the ineffable satisfaction of looking back at convictions cherished and matured into genuine conversion, and the solemn purposes they had formed, not tampered with and disregarded, but carried into execution, as was the case with him whose career we are now considering. It is time, however, for us to pass on to notice—

III. THE CORDIAL WELCOME HE RECEIVED.—"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to the servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet : and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it ; and let us eat and be merry." We see here—

1. What this loving father felt, and how, under the influence of those feelings, he acted. It is very probable that the prodigal, as he trudged along day after day, was the subject of many harassing doubts and painfully anxious misgivings. Would his father receive him ? Would he take pity upon, and welcome him home ; or would he spurn him from his presence, and shut the door against him ? Should this be the case, he would ask himself, what, what will become of me ? Ah ! I shall then have nothing to do but to die. Vain, however, were all such thoughts, as he discovered to the joy

of his bursting heart, when he found himself locked in his father's tender embrace. O wondrous welcome! No upbraidings, no reproaches were cast upon him, but all was love, all was mercy. As it has been well observed, "the eye of mercy saw him, the bowels of mercy yearned towards him, the feet of mercy ran to meet him, the arms of mercy embraced him, and the lips of mercy kissed him."

2. The words the father addressed, not to his son, but to the servants. For a while, doubtless, the peculiar emotions felt by both, were too deep to allow either to speak; their tongues would be likely to cleave to the roof of their mouth; and it was not until the transports of overwhelming joy had in a measure subsided that the silence was broken. This was first done by the son, who said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But the father would hear no more, and interrupting the penitential confession, he turns to the domestics, who had now gathered around to witness the affecting sight, and says, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again, he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

In the conduct of this kind and compassionate father, what do we see? We have here a faint representation of the character of Him, who is merciful and gracious, who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and is waiting to receive the most abandoned to his friendship and favour. Let such, then, be encouraged to return to him; to seek him while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near. Those who are truly humbled, and mourn over their grievous departures, need not fear his chidings; such as do so know not the far more than paternal love which glows in his eternal

breast. Hear what he says by the prophet—"I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself"—I marked the very words he uttered, and noticed his self-upbraidings. It is enough—"Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." What stubborn Ephraim ought not by such a representation to be subdued; what trembling sinner ought not by the contemplation of such tenderness and loving kindness to be encouraged!

A person on his death-bed once made the mournful acknowledgment, "that he had wandered like the prodigal, but had not like the prodigal returned." Wandered like the prodigal we all have; in this respect his history and ours are identical, though some have gone farther from God, and from the paths of rectitude, than others. But have we like the prodigal returned? If, after all the inducements and encouragements held out to us for that purpose, we continue to pursue our sinful and infatuated career, the inevitable consequence will be that we must remain aliens and outcasts, and from the great Father's house, with its many mansions, be eternally excluded.

But in connection with the prodigal, it only remains for us to notice—

IV. THE SOLITARY DRAWBACK HE ENCOUNTERED.—
"Now his elder brother was in the field," &c. What a spirit did this brother display! How unnatural, how unreasonable, how repulsive! And yet the displeasure he manifests was just the feeling which actuated the self-righteous Pharisees, when they said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them;" and they could hardly fail to perceive, as they did on other occasions, that the parable was spoken against them. Among other particulars which are here specified, we may mention the following:—

1. The elder son proclaims his own merits. "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment." How characteristic is this language, and how identical its spirit with his who declared, "All these things have I kept from my youth up."

2. He exaggerates the evil doings of his brother. That he had spent all is true, but to charge him with having devoured his living with harlots, could be only an inference which it might not be easy to substantiate. At all events, it was a charge that was not prompted by the laudable desire of putting the best construction upon a doubtful case; whatever be the motive by which it was suggested, it certainly bore no relation to that charity which thinketh no evil.

3. He accuses his father of having acted ungenerously towards himself. He who had been so dutiful a son, so faithful, so laborious, what encouragement had he ever received! "Thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends; but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." The father, however, simply replies to this reproachful accusation by saying, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

From the spirit of this elder son, may the good Lord deliver us! To see a prodigal return, is a sight that should cause us, not to murmur, but rejoice. At what should we rejoice, if not at the conversion of a poor sinner from the error of his ways? For then an immortal being is snatched from the opening gulf, and a wretched captive of sin and Satan is released from the most terrific thralldom. Such an event, however it may be regarded on earth, produces transporting gladness in heaven; there is joy there, through all its courts, over one sinner that repenteth.

THE DRAG-NET.

AGAIN, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO A NET, THAT WAS CAST INTO THE SEA, AND GATHERED OF EVERY KIND; WHICH, WHEN IT WAS FULL THEY DREW TO SHORE, AND SAT DOWN, AND GATHERED THE GOOD INTO VESSELS, BUT CAST THE BAD AWAY. SO SHALL IT BE AT THE END OF THE WORLD: THE ANGELS SHALL COME FORTH, AND SEVER THE WICKED FROM AMONG THE JUST, AND SHALL CAST THEM INTO THE FURNACE OF FIRE: THERE SHALL BE WAILING AND GNASHING OF TEETH.—Mat. xiii. 47-50.

THIS parable was delivered from a ship, and addressed to a large multitude that were gathered on the sea shore. It is probable that many of them, like the disciples, did business on the great waters; they would be likely therefore, to feel a special interest in what is here stated.

I. THE OCCUPATION IMPLIED.—Ministers of the gospel are set forth under various similitudes. In an earlier part of this chapter they are represented as sowers; in other places they are called shepherds, labourers, &c. But it is no unusual thing for them to be spoken of as fishermen.

It is a toilsome occupation in which the latter class are engaged. So with the servants of Christ; they have to work hard, in season and out of season.

In pursuing his calling, the fisherman has one object in view, and unless that object be accomplished, all his toil is in vain. What he aims at is to catch fish; and what the minister of the gospel should aim at, is to save souls.

II. THE RESULT DECLARED.—“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into

vessels, but cast the bad away." Nets are of various kinds and sizes; that which is referred to here was one of the largest. Drag-nets are sometimes nearly a quarter of a mile long, and thus take a sweep of considerable extent. In this the wide range of the gospel is indicated.

The net collected whatever was found within the space of water through which it was drawn. It is to this circumstance that the parable mainly refers. As the fish that were gathered in were of all descriptions, some valuable and some worthless; so the Christian church is at present in a mixed condition. In the Saviour's teaching this truth appears with great prominence; and there are two important uses to which it may be applied.

1. To refute a common objection. When religious professors bring scandal on the cause with which they are identified, the enemies of Christianity are in the habit of pointing to such in order to prove that the whole system is false, and that all pretensions to piety are nothing but hypocrisy. Now such occurrences, however distressing, should cause no surprise, for it was clearly shown from the beginning that it would be so. If, indeed, there were no bad intermingled with the good, that might be adduced as an objection; but when things turn out just as the great Founder of our religion foretold, it is an argument in support of his claims, and not against them.

2. Inasmuch as the visible church is thus mixed, all who name the name of Christ should be jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy, and not rest without seeking to ascertain what is their true character. "Examine yourselves," says the apostle, "whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves, know yet not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates."

III. THE EXPLANATION GIVEN.—"So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever

the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

1. The period when the separation will take place. There are many important aspects in which "the end of the world" should be viewed; but none are more important than this. Then the precious and the vile, the wheat and the tares, the good fish and the bad, will be fully and finally severed from each other. Like will be gathered to like, and the time of indiscriminate admixture will be no longer.

2. The agents by whom it will be accomplished. In the parable, the same persons who caught the fish made the separation; but on the great day the wicked will be severed from the just by the holy angels. At the bidding of the Judge they will come forth, to gather out of the kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.

3. The solemn issue in which it will terminate. To be cast into a furnace of fire is a terrible image, and denotes the extremity of suffering. This, combined with the words that follow, "there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth," gives a fearful representation of that world where God has forgotten to be gracious, and where his mercy is clean gone for ever.

THE TALENTS.

FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AS A MAN TRAVELLING INTO A FAR COUNTRY, WHO CALLED HIS OWN SERVANTS, AND DELIVERED UNTO THEM HIS GOODS. AND UNTO ONE HE GAVE FIVE TALENTS, TO ANOTHER TWO, AND TO ANOTHER ONE; TO EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS SEVERAL ABILITY; AND STRAIGHTWAY TOOK HIS JOURNEY. THEN HE THAT HAD RECEIVED THE FIVE TALENTS WENT AND TRADED WITH THE SAME, AND MADE THEM OTHER FIVE TALENTS. AND LIKEWISE HE THAT HAD RECEIVED TWO, HE ALSO GAINED OTHER TWO. BUT HE THAT HAD RECEIVED ONE WENT AND DIGGED IN THE EARTH, AND HID HIS LORD'S MONEY. AFTER A LONG TIME THE LORD OF THOSE SERVANTS COMETH, AND RECKONETH WITH THEM. AND SO HE THAT HAD RECEIVED FIVE TALENTS CAME, &c.—Mat. xxv. 14-30.

IN the previous parable, that of the ten virgins, the duties inculcated are those of waiting and watching; in this the great lesson enforced is that of Christian activity. To be looking for the coming of the Lord is a most important exercise; but such an expectation, far from being incompatible with, ought to be a powerful incentive to, the utmost diligence in our high and holy calling. We are not to wait with folded hands, in a posture of inglorious ease and slothful security, but we are to be always abounding in the work of the Lord. Both of these features are combined in the former chapter, where it is said, "Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come;" and "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." It is, however, immediately added, "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

The present parable brings before us the case of a

person who was about undertaking a long journey. Previous to his departure he made certain arrangements with his servants ; and to those arrangements, with the results which followed, our attention is here directed.

I. WHAT WAS COMMITTED TO THEM.—“ For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one ; to every man according to his several ability ; and straightway took his journey.” In these verses three things are set forth.

1. It was a responsible trust. They were not at liberty to do as they pleased, for what was delivered to them was the property of their master, and they would have to answer to him for the use they made of it. Now, however prone we may be to speak of one thing and another as our own, yet nothing is so in truth, our sins only excepted. “ The ground of a certain rich man,” we are told, “ brought forth plentifully : and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow *my* fruits ? And he said, this will I do : I will pull down my barns, and build greater ; and there will I bestow all *my* fruits and *my* goods.” But though he spoke thus, the rebuke he received, and the fearful doom with which he was visited, said to him as they say to us, “ Talk no more so exceeding loftily, and let not arrogancy come out of your mouth.” Very different were the feelings of the pious monarch of Israel, when, in a strain of glowing adoration, he exclaimed, “ Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty ; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine : thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and power come of thee, and thou reignest over all ; and in thine hand is honour and might ; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. But who am I, and what is my people, that

we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."

Not only were they "his goods" which this master delivered, but those to whom they were committed were "his own servants." As such he had a right to their service, and special claims upon their fidelity. And what is the relationship that we sustain to our Creator and Redeemer? Do we not belong to him in a sense the most absolute and peculiar? A slave is regarded as the property of his owner, but the authority he exercises over him has its limits. Over the outward man with all its members, he has full control; he can fetter its limbs, and make deep furrows upon its back, until the blood flows in copious streams. But from within there issues a voice by which that despotic power is rebuked and arrested, saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther." Beneath that sable skin there are thoughts and feelings, free as the air, which no chains can bind, which refuse to submit to the tyrant's sway, and which set all his fury at defiance. On the contrary, the right which the great Proprietor has to us embraces the inner as well as the outward man. Our whole body, and soul, and spirit, belong to Him. He is thus our Master, and we are his servants, in a sense the most emphatic; and in order to feel our responsibility aright, it is necessary that we never lose sight of this important consideration.

There is another thought suggested by the expression, "his own servants." Not only did they belong to the person spoken of in the parable, but they were also maintained by him. Had he delivered his goods to any of his neighbours or friends, and entered into a contract with them, even they would have been culpable had they neglected to improve the trust committed to them. But these were his own servants, whom he had to support at his own expense during the whole time he was away. They were therefore under special obligations to promote

his interests to the utmost of their power; and their guilt, if they proved unfaithful, as one of them did, would thereby be materially enhanced.

Of the traitor it is said, "He which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." Now to say nothing of acts of wilful rebellion, is it nothing, while we live upon God's bounty from day to day, for us to disregard his express injunctions, and withhold from him the homage, the obedience, the service which he claims? Is it not in Him that we live, and move, and have our being? Is it not from Him we get the food that sustains us, the clothing that covers us, the fuel that warms us, the dwellings that shelter us, the friends that comfort us? Surely nothing can be more inconsistent, no injustice be more flagrant, no ingratitude more monstrous, than for us to receive all from God, and yet disown his authority, act as if we were our own masters, and be altogether indifferent about pleasing him.

2. The trust committed to the servants was not alike in the case of all. There are two respects in which the divine favours differ, namely, as regards their nature and their amount. Some are endowed with intellectual gifts, others with influence, and others with property, as in the case before us. Wealth is a talent by no means to be despised; for although the love of money is the root of all evil, yet the faithful and sanctified use of it may be almost said to be the root of all good. Not to mention the temporal blessings it secures, how great is its value in relation to the most blessed and glorious of all enterprises, the promotion of true religion, and the conversion of the world to Christ. There is a sense, and that by no means an unimportant one, in which money can say in the words of the great Master, "Without me, ye can do nothing." What would become of all your projects, all your multifarious organizations, without me? Your Bible societies, your Missionary societies, your Tract societies, would soon have to wind up their concerns, and

suspend their useful operations, without me. Your places of worship cannot be erected, your schools cannot be sustained, your ministry, whether at home or abroad, cannot be supported, if I withhold my aid. On me depends, in no small measure, the working out of the whole of your schemes, and the accomplishment of those sublime and beneficent objects in which you take so deep an interest." Now this witness is undoubtedly true. In many respects it is the most important of all agencies; not in itself, but on account of what it secures, for it sets almost every other instrumentality at work, and keeps the entire machinery in constant motion. Those therefore who are possessed of this world's goods are highly favoured; if they are only faithful stewards, how eminently useful may they be!

But what was entrusted to these servants differed, not in its nature, but in its amount. "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one." Variety in harmony distinguishes all the works of God, whether of nature, of providence, or of grace. In the visible creation what almost infinite diversity appears, extending from the crawling worm to the soaring eagle, from the pebble on the beach to the glorious orbs which shine so resplendently in the vaulted skies. Among rational creatures we find all grades of rank and condition, from the meanest peasant to the mightiest prince, from the drivelling idiot to the greatest intellectual giants, whose amazing powers have been the wonder and admiration of all ages. With the angelic hosts it is so likewise, for those morning stars differ from each other in glory. And in the church below, though all true disciples are fellow-heirs of the same inheritance, yet there are diversities of gifts, of offices, of administrations. While there is but one body, there are many members; some answering to the head, and others, less dignified, but still needful, answering to the hands and feet.

3. The bestowal of these trusts was regulated by a certain principle. There was given "to every man according to his several ability." On many occasions we are called upon to acknowledge the divine sovereignty; we have to be still, and know that he is God. He claims the right of doing what he will with his own, and is under no obligations to give account to any of his matters. Should any one therefore accuse him of acting with partiality, of showing respect to persons, and contend, like the impious Jews of old, that his ways are not equal; it is sufficient to say, "Who art thou, O man, that repliest against God?" His authority is absolute, and all creatures are in his hands, as clay in the hands of the potter.

At the same time, God's sovereignty is not that arbitrary thing that many imagine. He has his reasons for what he does, although he does not think proper always to disclose them. This the Saviour taught when he said, "Even so, Father, *for so it seemed good in thy sight.*" And as his judgment is always according to truth, what seems good to him, is sure to be good, absolutely and supremely good.

But in the present instance we are informed of the reason by which the bestowal of the several trusts was regulated. And what is here stated is evidently intended to remind us of an important principle of God's government, namely, that when he confers his favours he has respect to the condition and capacities of his people. If he gives more to one than another, or if he places one in a higher position than another, it is not merely because such is his good will and pleasure, regarded in the abstract; but all his arrangements are directed by infinite wisdom, and also prompted by the most considerate kindness and tender mercy. He knoweth our frame, our whole corporeal, mental, and spiritual constitution; and he deals with us accordingly in the work he gives us to do, as well as in the trials he appoints us to bear.

All in an army are not qualified to be generals or captains, nor all in the church to be leaders and governors. A person may be raised to a position for which he is manifestly incompetent, for it is not always that the right man is in the right place; but those to whom he was indebted for his promotion would have been truer friends to the individual himself, to say nothing of the injury done to the public interest, if their influence had been exerted to keep him in a humbler and less responsible sphere. Let us now return to the servants before us, and see—

II. WHAT WAS DONE BY THEM.—“Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one, went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.”

1. The faithful. Between five talents and two there is a considerable difference, for according to the usual reckoning, the value of the former was about £1200, and that of the latter £480. Now the fact that both servants doubled these sums, and thus actually cleared by their traffic, whatever its nature may have been, an amount equal to what they received at the beginning, shows that they must have put forth no ordinary diligence. Their master had gone to a distant land, so that they were not goaded by his interference, or watched by his constant presence, or cheered by his approving smile; and yet they strove and struggled as laboriously as if they were under his immediate eye. It was not for themselves, but for their absent lord, that they thus toiled; their rising up early, sitting up late, and eating the bread of carefulness, was in order to fill his coffers, and augment his already ample stores. Their industry was therefore as disinterested as it was assiduous. They could lay claim to no recompense, and if they received any it would only be as a free gift.

Let us strive then to imitate their example ; for it is only as we give all diligence, and keep continually adding one attainment to another, that we shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of the Lord. It is the hand of the diligent that maketh rich, rich in the wealth of this world, and rich in those spiritual possessions, which are incorruptible and never pass away.

2. The slothful. "But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money." Why, it may be asked, did he do so? Further on we find him stating his reason, but the strong probability is that the cause he then assigned was not the real one. His conduct may be attributed to three things, either of which is more probable than what is mentioned by himself.

(1.) A spirit of dissatisfaction. He was of course aware of what was committed to the other servants, and he felt, no doubt, that he had been slighted and degraded. He thought it not fair or honourable for his lord to make such invidious distinctions, but that each should be treated alike, and receive the same proof of his confidence. But to be placed last, to be stigmatized as the most inferior and incapable of all—he looked upon it as an insult, and it is not unlikely that he would, if he dared, have thrown back the talent with disdain. He had, however, to conceal his displeasure, and receive with outward respect what was placed in his hands. But it would seem that he decided at once how he would act, for he went and hid the money in the earth, and resolved that his master should have it back just as he had received it. If we in like manner are dissatisfied with the divine arrangements, think that we are not fairly dealt with, and envy the more favoured lot of our brethren, such feelings will act as a dead weight upon our energies, and render it impossible for us to serve the great Master with alacrity and delight.

(2.) Or this servant may have felt that it was in vain

for him to exert himself, on the ground that his means were so limited. He probably thought that if he did his utmost, the profit would be comparatively insignificant; and because he could not expect to realize any large returns, he supposed it would not much matter if he gained nothing at all. Thus many, in order to excuse their religious inactivity, are disposed to say, What can we do? Had we the wealth, the abilities, the opportunities that others have, we might then be able to do something; but endowed and circumstanced as we are, to put forth any effort is altogether useless. It would, however, be well for such to remember the Saviour's words, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much." The highest eulogium which his sacred lips pronounced during his earthly sojourn had reference to one who was able to do but little, even a feeble, obscure, unassuming woman, of whom he said, "she hath done what she could." It is well for us to have low thoughts of ourselves, but if it be to justify us in doing nothing that we depreciate our abilities, we may be sure that we are influenced by false humility, and not that which is in the sight of God of great price.

(3.) Again, this servant may have been one of those timid, over-cautious persons, who, lest they should do wrong, do nothing. The risks connected with trading he might have regarded as so great, that it was possible he would lose all, and then what would his lord say? Taking credit therefore to himself for being an eminently prudent man, he went and digged a deep hole in the earth, and there securely concealed the money. But a fearful and faint-hearted spirit is almost as much to be shunned as a murmuring and dissatisfied spirit. If we never venture we are likely never to win. A captain of a ship once said, "that if he could get anything by it, he would run his vessel into the mouth of hell, though he should scorch his sails in doing so." Such language

is to be condemned for its impiety, but the boldness, the daring and determined resolution it breathes, excites our admiration ; while at the same time it reminds us of the contrast presented by the children of this world, who are so much wiser in their generation than the children of light. We have already remarked that we should give all diligence if we wish to be preserved from being barren and unfruitful ; but it is worthy of special notice that among the things specified by the apostle in reference to which that diligence should be shown, to “add to our faith, *fortitude*,” occupies the foremost place in his striking and most emphatic exhortation.

III. THE ACCOUNT REQUIRED FROM THEM.—Under this head the following particulars may be noticed.

1. It was delayed for a considerable period. “After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.” Our thoughts are here directed to the great day of final settlement, when all will be dealt with according to their works. There is a sense, it is true, in which men are often called to account in the present world ; for the rewards of the just and unjust, of the faithful and faithless, are far from being altogether future. “Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth ; much more the wicked and the sinner.” “If they,” says Matthew Henry, “have two heavens who merit neither, much more shall they have two hells who deserve both.” But it is when the great Master returns, when he will come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, as we read in the latter part of this chapter, that the matter will be fully gone into, and the final decision be pronounced.

That solemn event has been foretold from the earliest periods of the world’s history ; for even Enoch, the seventh from Adam, proclaimed, “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints.” But as age after age passed away without any indications of its approach, the ungodly became more reckless and stout-

hearted, and cast off all shame and all fear. As the wise man declares; "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." But though long delayed, the appointed day will surely come, and come too soon for those by whom the riches of the divine goodness and forbearance have been despised. With the Lord a thousand years are as one day, and therefore he can afford to wait. "Had he any occasion," as one remarks, "to doubt the issue, he might, at times, be tempted to precipitate the end. But he sees the end from the beginning; sees it so clearly, and awaits it so confidently, that his patience only proclaims the efficiency of his government. If impatience of his apparent delay could have induced him to hasten the final event, if suspicions of his power, if misconstructions of his patience, could have provoked him to rashness, long before this he would have sworn that time should be no longer. But his forbearance serves to illustrate his majesty; and is meant to remind us, that if he does not submit his plans to our present impatience, and compress them into the limits of time, it is because he reserves them for a nobler theatre, and deems them worthy the expanse of eternity." But to proceed with the description before us, we remark in the next place that the reckoning was—

2. Highly gratifying in the case of those who were first summoned. "And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faith-

ful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." As the two had been equally faithful, they received the same reward. The latter had only gained two talents, it is true, while the other had gained five; but as both had doubled the original amount, the one was as cordially welcomed as the other. We have thus brought before us the important principle to which the apostle refers, a principle on which the Lord now acts, and by which his ultimate decisions will be regulated: "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." What our divine Master looks at is not the absolute, but the relative amount of what we do for him: and in his book of remembrance, the chronicles of the heavenly kingdom, acts and offerings which in themselves greatly differ, are set down at the self-same valuation. Opposite the widow's mite, as well as Mary's precious ointment, are written the words which we have already quoted, "she hath done what she could;" and on those who have done far more than either, no higher commendation can be bestowed.

The language addressed to the servants after they gave in their account, is exceedingly striking and comprehensive. In its spiritual application it is full of encouragement to those who serve the Lord Christ, and whose daily inquiry is, "What wilt thou have me to do?" It is here shown that their work will be gloriously rewarded; and the contemplation of the promised recompense should quicken our zeal, and lead us during the short period of our lives which yet remains, to consecrate afresh all our energies and powers to his praise. Let us then glance for a moment at what is set forth in these wonderful words.

(1.) An emphatic expression of approval. The approbation of our fellow-creatures is by no means to be despised; that of the righteous should be especially

esteemed as a priceless treasure. But compared with the divine approval, what is the good opinion of the wisest or best of the children of men? Not only is the approbation of heaven more than sufficient to counterbalance the censures and reproaches of an ungodly world, but it infinitely transcends a whole universe of applause. What, then, will be the feelings of the believer, when he hears the words pronounced from the excellent glory, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" Will he not be filled with amazement? Will he not be lost in wonder, love, and praise? When our Lord commenced his public ministry, it is said that all wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth; and so it will most assuredly be with us, should it be our happy lot to hear these words, so ineffably gracious, proclaimed above our unworthy heads. For Him, whose favour is life, to acknowledge us as his servants; and, overlooking our manifold imperfections, to call us his good and faithful servants! For Him to say, and that from his radiant throne, and before an assembled world, while his blessed countenance is beaming with unbounded satisfaction, Well done! And as soon as the sentence is uttered, it will be echoed and re-echoed by the whole company of saints and angels, until the celestial mansions will ring with the thunders of their applause.

(2.) Promotion to a state of high dignity and honour. "Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things." This declaration is confirmed and explained by various express assurances which are given in other passages, where the idea of rule and authority is prominently introduced as one of the elements of the future recompense of the saints. "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me." Of all whose robes are washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb, it is said that they are "made kings and priests unto God."

Those who have received abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, are "to reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever." When speaking of those who will be accounted worthy to obtain *that* world, the Saviour says that they shall be "equal unto the angels"—a statement in which the particular under consideration is clearly involved. Thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, are the titles given to them, titles which indicate that they occupy positions of trust, and are invested with great authority in the celestial empire. But, though natives of that glorious realm, though their original rank in the scale of being is so elevated, and though they have never swerved from their allegiance for a single moment; yet they are to have no pre-eminence over those who in this lower sphere have obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. The one will be placed on a par with the other, and exercise similar lordship in the government of the eternal King.

(3.) The enjoyment of transporting bliss. In this world posts of honour by no means secure the personal happiness of their occupants. The greatest earthly dignity is that of being seated on a throne; yet those who are thus exalted find that "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." But here the highest honour and the highest happiness are combined: for in addition to the former particular it is said, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord,"—words as strange and glorious as any that are contained within the whole compass of the sacred volume. How truly amazing is the thought that the joy of every faithful servant is to be no other than the joy of his Lord: not merely the joy of which he is the source, but that of which he is himself the subject. It is the joy that was set before him, in anticipation of which he endured the cross and despised its shame; the

joy wherein consists that recompense of reward which the Father conferred upon him for all his toils and agonies here below. This is the joy of which his people will be partakers ; it will be identical with his, as far as their-respective natures and capacities will admit of ; the Head and the members will be glorified together. And this emphatic expression reminds us, not only of the nature of the joy, but of its fulness. They are to enter into it, and be completely swallowed up and absorbed by it. The joy will possess them, rather than they possess the joy. The servants of Christ are not strangers to joy on earth ; they have the streams which refresh and gladden their spirits here, but they will have the overflowing fountain there. Here joy enters into them, but there, so superabundant will it be, they will enter into joy ; enter into it as into an inexhaustible and boundless ocean, without a bottom or a shore !

But from these pleasing and lofty themes we must turn to contemplate the case of the other servant. From what we have seen already, it is evident that his account could not fail to be—

3. Unsatisfactory in its nature, and most serious in its results. This part of the subject brings before us—

(1.) A foolish plea. “Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed : and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine.” We have already adverted to what appears to be the true cause of his having acted as he did ; but here we have the reason which he himself assigned. He contends that his lord was hard, severe, unreasonable in his requirements, extreme to mark what was amiss, and taking undue advantage of what was done by his servants. On this account he says that he was afraid, and under the influence of such a feeling he went and buried his talent

in the earth. As we said before, we believe this to be a mere excuse ; but whether it was so or not, one thing is certain, that to our Master the description will in no wise apply. “Ye serve the Lord Christ,” says the apostle ; and what is his character ? The very opposite of that which is here given. Not stern, not difficult to please, not unmindful to make allowances, and take extenuating circumstances into account, is he. Let one instance suffice in proof of this. When in the garden of Gethsemane the sorrows of death compassed him, and the pangs of hell got hold upon him ; it was the season of his last and most fearful conflict ; it was the hour and power of darkness. Surely his disciples were then ready, especially the favoured three, to do all they could to alleviate his sufferings, and comfort his agonising heart. But no ; forgetting his sorrows, and forgetting their own, they fell asleep. When he saw them in such a state, he rebuked them ; but with what tenderness and gentleness did he do so ! All he said was, “What, could ye not watch with me one hour ?” In a short time he came to them again, and finding them still in the same condition, instead of reproving them, he began to apologise for them, saying, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” As if he had said, I am fully convinced of your affection ; I do not doubt the attachment you feel for me ; therefore I compassionate your weakness, and accept the will for the deed. Such is the character of *our* Lord ; whatever be that of other masters, he is a most indulgent one ; not unfeeling, not unreasonable, not oppressive, but very pitiful and of tender mercy.

(2.) A withering rebuke. “His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed : thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own, with usury.”

He is called a wicked and slothful servant ; wicked in that he attempted to defend himself by calumniating his lord, and slothful, as his whole conduct clearly shows. The language he had just employed is repeated word for word, in order to convict him on his own principles. Thou knewest that I was a hard master, didst thou ? Be it so ; that is a point I shall not at present dispute ; but if such was thy conviction, how is it that thy conduct has not been in harmony therewith ? Knowing that I was severe and exacting, it might be naturally expected that thou wouldst have been much more diligent in consequence. If, however, thou wert fearful lest by the hazards of commerce my property might be lost, and expected that I should hold thee responsible for it ; how is it that thou didst not adopt a method in which no risk was involved, that of putting it out to interest, for then there would be something for me to receive in return ? To this the servant had nothing to say ; he was condemned out of his own mouth, as will be the case on the great day with the whole class who are represented by him. When the Lord cometh to execute judgment, all gainsayers will be silenced and confounded ; they will be convinced with an overwhelming conviction, not only of all the ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, but of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against him.

(3.) A peremptory command. "Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." How many by their own negligence forfeit all the advantages they once enjoyed ! And what can be more reasonable than for such to be deprived of every means, both of getting good and of doing good, who cared not to avail themselves of them while they had opportunity. Those, on the other hand, shall receive still more who make a proper improvement of what they have already.

(4.) A fearful doom. "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." There are two classes by whom this solemn sentence should be deeply pondered. The first are those who flatter themselves that, because they have not committed any notorious sins, there is no need for them to feel any alarm in looking forward to the day of final reckoning. But what notorious sins had this man committed? He had not wasted his substance in riotous living like the prodigal, nor defrauded his master like the unjust steward, nor incurred an overwhelming debt like the unmerciful servant. We read of one in the former chapter, who during his lord's absence began to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; but the person before us had not indulged in conduct so disgraceful. And yet even he was visited with this terrible punishment. The negation of evil is looked upon by many as positive worthiness; but we are here shown how erroneous as well as dangerous it is to think so.

And then if the unprofitable servant, though free from all that was grossly vicious, was consigned to outer darkness; how shall they escape who pursue a course of open rebellion, and are guilty of the most enormous offences? If those who have not properly improved the talents committed to them will be thus dealt with; what will become of the numerous class who abuse their talents, and prostitute them to the vilest purposes? Thus, on the one hand, while all who pride themselves upon their negative virtues and boast of their harmless lives, should take warning from this parable; on the other hand, it gives special emphasis to the apostle's question, "Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

AGAIN, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO A MERCHANTMAN, SEEKING GOODLY PEARLS: WHO, WHEN HE HAD FOUND ONE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE, WENT AND SOLD ALL THAT HE HAD, AND BOUGHT IT.—Matt. xiii. 45, 46.

In its general features this parable resembles the one immediately preceding it, that of the treasure hid in the field. But there is one point in which they differ. In the former case the treasure was met with unsought, while here the merchantman was employed in searching for pearls, and it was in consequence of his researches and inquiries that he found one of great price.

I. THIS PEARL MAY BE APPROPRIATELY REGARDED AS A REPRESENTATION OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

1. The rarity of a gem greatly enhances its value. Now he stands alone, being altogether unique and unparalleled. The single circumstance that in him deity and humanity are mysteriously combined, at once stamps his character with a glorious and ineffable exclusiveness.

2. A gem that is entirely free from flaws is regarded as highly precious. In the most eminent saints, Abraham, Moses, David, and others, there was much to admire, but there were also some things to deplore. Here, however, is one without blemish and without spot. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.

3. The value of a gem materially depends upon the size of it. Of the Saviour it can be said, that he is so great, that all other persons and objects are insignificant when placed beside him. To measure him, not physically, but morally and spiritually, is far beyond our power. But—

II. BEFORE WE CAN FEEL A REAL DESIRE TO POSSESS CHRIST, HIS INESTIMABLE VALUE MUST BE IN SOME MEASURE APPREHENDED.

1. Of this truth the case of the Jews affords a convincing demonstration. How wonderfully was the prediction of Isaiah fulfilled: "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

2. To reveal Jesus in his matchless worth is the special office of the Holy Spirit. When the eyes of the understanding are savingly enlightened, he will then appear the chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.

III. THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO SEE AND FEEL THE SAVIOUR'S WORTH WILL REGARD NO SACRIFICE TOO GREAT IN ORDER TO BE MADE PARTAKERS OF HIM.—More especially—

1. We must be willing to part with our own righteousness.

2. The favour of our dearest friends, should their claims clash with his.

3. Every known sin, however agreeable or profitable.

THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW.

AND HE SPAKE A PARABLE UNTO THEM TO THIS END, THAT MEN OUGHT ALWAYS TO PRAY, AND NOT TO FAINT; SAYING, THERE WAS IN A CITY A JUDGE, WHICH FEARED NOT GOD, NEITHER REGARDED MAN: AND THERE WAS A WIDOW IN THAT CITY; AND SHE CAME UNTO HIM, SAYING, AVENGE ME OF MINE ADVERSARY. AND HE WOULD NOT FOR A WHILE: BUT AFTERWARD HE SAID WITHIN HIMSELF, THOUGH I FEAR NOT GOD, NOR REGARD MAN; YET BECAUSE THIS WIDOW TROUBLETH ME, I WILL AVENGE HER, &c.—Luke xviii. 1-8.

In attempting a brief and popular exposition of these words, we shall notice—

I. THE IMPORTANT TRUTH WHICH IS HERE STATED.—It is found in the first verse, and is introductory to all that follows. “And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” We may observe—

1. That prayer is our clear and incumbent duty. It is said that men *ought* to pray; they are under the most solemn obligations to do so; it is an exercise the observance of which is imposed by the highest authority, and cannot be neglected without incurring the displeasure of Him, in whom we live, and move, and have our being.

It is a duty of universal obligation. The words state that *men* ought to pray, signifying evidently men without exception, of every class and character. By some the sentiment is held that none but true believers should be exhorted to pray; the grounds on which it is maintained being that the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, and that as prayer is a spiritual act, it is impossible for it to be performed by unconverted sinners. It is true that the wicked do nothing that is well-pleasing in the sight of God, for none of their works are

done with a view to his glory, or in obedience to his commands. Even upon their ordinary pursuits He cannot look down with approbation, for it is said that the very "ploughing of the wicked is sin." It is so, not in itself, but because of the principle by which they are actuated, and the selfish and sensual ends at which they aim. The fruits of the earth, as well as the other bounties of providence, they abuse and pervert, consuming them upon their lusts, and turning them into instruments of unrighteousness. But does it follow from this that men should cease to pursue the common avocations of life, or that there would be any impropriety in exhorting them to be diligent in attending to their appointed callings? It is certainly man's duty to plough, and that it is his duty to pray is no less certain. As to his inability it evidently arises from the aversion of his carnal mind; and is God to set aside his own requirements because his creatures feel no inclination to comply with them? If there ever was a carnally-minded man it was Simon the sorcerer, for so blind, so debased, so infatuated was he, that he supposed the divine Spirit could be bought with gold and silver. And yet to him, though in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity, was the exhortation addressed, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

2. That this duty should be observed, not on extraordinary occasions alone, but habitually and constantly. It is no uncommon thing for persons to call upon God in seasons of distress, who live at other times altogether regardless of him. He is in none of their thoughts when everything is calm and secure; and as for his commands, they treat them with the utmost indifference, if not contempt. But let them be visited with any fearful calamity, or seized with some dangerous malady; let them be suddenly brought to the brink of the grave,

and into close contact with the terrors of the eternal world; then, oppressd with bitter anguish, and filled with awful alarm, they begin to cry earnestly to the Lord, and implore his mercy. But how often, after he has graciously interposed on their behalf, have they forgotten, with base ingratitude, the hand which had been stretched out for their deliverance! Their supplications were only called forth by a selfish apprehension of danger, and as soon as the peril was over, prayer was thought of no more.

To call upon God when we are in distress, whether it be of mind, body, or estate, is the best expedient we can possibly adopt under such circumstances. He has said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble;" and he has promised to be "a very present help in time of need." So the Psalmist found him, for he was accustomed in every emergency "to give himself unto prayer." "The sorrows of death," he says, "compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul." But what followed? He did not forget his great deliverer, for his language is, "I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplications; because he hath inclined his ear unto me, *therefore will I call upon him as long as I live.*" Not merely was he persuaded "that men ought always to pray," but he resolved in his own case to act accordingly.

3. That delays and other discouragements should not be permitted to depress our minds, and lead us to restrain prayer before God. This is the special truth which the Saviour enforced on this occasion, and therefore it will be necessary for us to enlarge upon it somewhat more fully. We have many instances in which the Most High has granted an immediate answer to the supplications of his people. As Charnock observes, "He often opens his hands while we are opening our lips, and his

blessings meet our petitions at the first setting out of their journey to heaven." Yea, it is written, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." But such is not always the case; if it were, there would be no need of the exhortation, "that men ought always to pray, *and not to faint.*"

The cause of God's delay in granting our requests is doubtless often to be found in ourselves. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." He cannot fail to be angry against the prayers of his people, if they regard iniquity in their hearts, or pursue aught that is evil in their conduct; and until the forbidden course be abandoned, or the secretly-cherished sin be slain, however frequently they may pray, it is certain that no answer will be received by them in return.

Again, the cold formality of our addresses to the throne of grace is a reason for the promised blessing being withheld. When God, by the mouth of his servant Malachi, reprov'd the Israelites for their hypocrisy, because they pretended to come to him with sacrifice, but brought the blind and lame instead of the male without blemish, he said to them, "Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?" So may we say concerning much that is called prayer. Offer it to thy prince, and see whether it will prevail with him. Offer it to thy benefactor, and see whether it will be answered by a gift. Offer it to thy friend whom thou hast offended, and see whether it will incline him to be reconciled. In a word, to solicit any favour from one of our fellow creatures, in the heartless manner in which we often address God, would most assuredly render the application unsuccessful.

But even when prayer is earnest, and when it is offered up with holy hands, without wrath or doubting, it is no uncommon thing for the answer to be long delayed. The afflicted saint may plead and wrestle, even with strong crying and many tears, yet it seems to be altogether in vain. Has God then forgotten to be gracious? Has he suffered his faithfulness to fail? Not so. He has his own purposes of mercy to accomplish, which require that the faith of his people should be tried, and that they should be subjected to a severe, but most necessary and profitable discipline. While the poor disconsolate believer is ready to say, "The Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me;" He, all the while, hears every groan, sees every falling tear, and registers every petition in the book of his remembrance.

Some lessons are hard to learn, and it is only after long and painful experience that we become proficient therein. Of such lessons one is, that we should never take delays to be denials. Many in their impatience and despondency have greatly erred in regard to this matter; they have drawn conclusions from God's dealings towards them which have cast reflections on his glorious character; not merely have they said in their haste that all men were liars, but they have been almost tempted to ask, Is there knowledge, and rectitude, and compassion in the Most High? But, shamed out of such hard thoughts and impious misgivings, by the interposition of Him who often makes man's extremity his own opportunity, they have at length been brought to see and feel that delays and denials are not identical, and that the one is by no means an indication of the other.

Let us then not grow weary, but persevere in the face of every discouragement. This is what the poor widow did, whose case we now proceed to consider. All that is declared concerning her most forcibly confirms the truth on which we have been insisting.

II. THE STRIKING ILLUSTRATION WHICH IS HERE GIVEN.

—“And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.” Let us notice—

1. The character of this judge. He was a thoroughly bad man, unprincipled, unjust, unfeeling. Of the important and responsible office which he held, he was altogether unworthy; for where integrity and uprightness are wanting in those who exercise the judicial functions, whatever other qualifications may be possessed, they only disgrace their high calling. “He that ruleth over men should be just;” a truth which the law of nature proclaims, and which the divine law in a manner the most imperative enforces. As a sample of the precepts which God gave to his ancient people concerning this matter, we select the following:—“Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and the righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked. And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous.” “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.” “And I charged your judges at that time, saying, Hear the causes between your brethren, and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great.” This judge, however, cared nothing for God, consequently all such injunctions were utterly disregarded by him.

But there are many persons who, in the absence of religious principle, act with fairness and impartiality. The things which are true, and honest, and just, they may lightly esteem; but to act in violation of them they know would be highly inexpedient; for they would thereby forfeit the respect of their fellow-creatures, which they are most anxious to secure and retain. "So did not I, because of the fear of God," can the pious man say when he is tempted to do wrong; but the language of the mere worldling, if he spoke the truth, would be, So did not I, because I must keep up my character, and not run counter to public opinion. Here, however, was one who was uninfluenced by either of these motives: "he feared not God, neither regarded man." For the divine approbation or the divine displeasure he cared nothing; and as to what men might think or say of him he was equally indifferent. Let them cry Shame! it mattered not to him; he had a flinty heart and a brazen brow, and bade defiance alike to the censures of earth and of heaven.

2. The application he received. It was made by a poor widow, an object which has strong claims upon our sympathy. Deprived of the partner of her life, her chief earthly prop, her protector in danger, her guide in perplexity, her solace in distress, she was now left alone to fight her way in this troublesome world. It has, however, often happened that those who, when they had their husband's arm to lean upon, were all feebleness and timidity, have displayed an energy and determination, after that strong arm has been removed, which causes them to be a wonder unto many, and, above all, a wonder to themselves. Such, at all events, was the spirit which this widow now evinced, whatever her previous character might have been; and it is on that account that she is exhibited as a pattern for our imitation. Although there was everything in this judge to repel her approach, yet knowing that he alone had the

power to help her, she applies to him in the face of every discouragement. Concerning her application two things may be remarked.

(1.) It was definite. She had a special object in view, and to obtain that object was her sole business. Her petition, "Avenge me of mine adversary," appears, as it is here expressed, to be vindictive; but it means simply, "Right me," or, "Do me justice." Some one, taking advantage of her helpless condition, had defrauded her of her rights; and all she wanted was, not to have revenge upon her oppressor, but that the grievance might be redressed, and that what belonged to her might be restored. If the magistrate to whom she had now appealed, had been what he ought, "a terror to evil-doers and a praise to them that do well," he would have asked her at once, "What is thy petition, and what is thy request?" To such a demand she would have been able to give an explicit answer; for she knew what she wanted, and to get that was the one thing on which her mind was set.

One reason, doubtless, why our prayers are so ineffectual is because this feature is frequently absent. Many qualities are necessary to render them acceptable and successful, of which definiteness is by no means the least important. Desire is the soul of prayer; but he that asks for many things at once, or in quick succession, cannot feel strongly in reference to any of the subjects introduced. It is indispensable that desire, in order to be ardent, should be concentrated. Almost all the instances of prevailing supplications recorded in the scriptures are for definite blessings. Jacob wrestling with the angel, Paul when troubled with the thorn in the flesh, our Saviour during his agony in the garden, and many other examples might be adduced.

(2.) It was importunate and persevering. No little fortitude was required to apply once; and after meeting with a repulse, it would be still more difficult to come a

second time. But difficulties and discouragements she heeded not ; her single plea, with increasing earnestness, she pressed again and again ; she was determined not to yield until her suit was granted. Now mighty in prayer we cannot be, unless the mind which was in her be in us also. Without importunity and perseverance we cannot expect to succeed ; and it is probable that our suit has often failed at the throne of grace, when on the point of being carried, by our fainting and drawing back. It is true that the Saviour warns us against using vain repetitions ; but it is no vain repetition to keep crying and still crying, as this poor woman did ; for it is to encourage such repeated cries that her case is recorded.

3. The manner in which the application was treated. "And he would not for a while : but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man ; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." Thus her object was gained ; but though she proved successful, she was under only slight obligations, if any, for what was done on her behalf. It was from no sense of justice, no feeling of compassion, that the matter was taken up, but from pure selfishness. She had called upon him so frequently that at length he granted the request in order that he might be no more plagued and pestered by her. He acted towards this widow as many now do in regard to some troublesome beggars. They give them a trifle, it is true, but it is simply to get rid of them. It is time, however, for us to notice—

III. THE CONCLUSIVE INFERENCE WHICH IS HERE DEDUCED.—"And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them ? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." To perceive the force of this argument there are several considerations which it is necessary for us to

bear in mind. It will be seen that in Him, with whom we have to do, there is everything to inspire us with full confidence, that, in his own good time, he will interpose on our behalf, and do for us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think.

1. His character as the righteous Lord, that loveth righteousness. The general view entertained of the justice of God is, that it is only adapted to inspire terror and alarm ; but to think of it thus is to dishonour that glorious attribute. The inspired writers often speak of his righteousness ; but how do they speak of it ? With the most unbounded satisfaction, and the most exulting joy. " They shall abundantly utter," says the Psalmist, " the memory of thy great goodness : and shall *sing* of thy righteousness." " Clouds and darkness," he observes on another occasion, " are round about him ; but righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." It was the latter consideration that cheered his mind, while surrounded with much that was mysterious in the divine dealings ; and hence he adds, " The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice ; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof."

Are we then oppressed and persecuted ? Let us by prayer and supplication commit our cause to Him that judgeth righteously. A poor widow who had suffered wrongfully may appeal to an unjust judge, and her cry be disregarded ; but with our Judge it will be otherwise. " He delivers the needy when he crieth ; the poor also, and him that hath no helper."

2. The pleasure he takes in the exercise of the benevolent yearnings of his nature. The judge to whom the widow applied was as destitute of compassion as he was of rectitude ; but our God waiteth to be gracious, and delighteth in mercy. We read in one place of " his strange work ;" but whatever that may be, it is not relieving the distressed, not fulfilling the desire of them that fear him, not yielding to the importunity of those

who lay hold upon his strength, and stir themselves up to call upon his blessed name.

3. The special relationship in which he stands to his people. This widow was in no way related to the judge; she was probably an entire stranger to him; yet she prevailed at length even with him. "And shall not God avenge *his own elect*, which cry day and night unto him?" They are the objects of his special choice; he has loved them with an everlasting love; he regards them as his peculiar treasure; yea, so dear are they to him that he who touches them, touches the apple of his eye. For him therefore to give a deaf ear to their petitions is altogether impossible.

As the conclusion of the whole, the question is asked, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" How it will be then we know not; but this we know, that there has never yet been a period when faith has been anything like general in the world. The important matter however is, as to whether it exists in us. Would it be found in our hearts if the final summons were now issued, and the Lord Jesus appeared on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory? Let us honestly examine ourselves; and in so doing, we may be very materially assisted by what is set forth in this parable. True faith is sure to show itself in earnest prayer on the one hand, and in patient waiting on the other. Without these it can be said to us, in the words of the apostle, "Your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."

SIGNS FROM HEAVEN.

THE PHARISEES ALSO WITH THE SADDUCEES CAME, AND TEMPTING DESIRED HIM THAT HE WOULD SHOW THEM A SIGN FROM HEAVEN. HE ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO THEM, WHEN IT IS EVENING, YE SAY, IT WILL BE FAIR WEATHER, &c.—Matt. xvi. 1-4.

In these words we have—

I. A HYPOCRITICAL REQUEST.—It embraces the following particulars :—

1. What they desired. A sign from heaven.
2. The motive by which they were prompted.
3. In seeking to ensnare our Lord they laid aside their own differences, and kept the feelings of bitter animosity with which they regarded each other in abeyance.

II. A WITHERING REBUKE.—We see here—

1. What they were able to do. They could judge of natural occurrences by certain obvious and well-known indications.

2. What they failed in doing. Not discern the signs of the times.

III. AN INDIGNANT DENIAL.—“A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign : and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.”

THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

SALT IS GOOD ; BUT IF THE SALT HAVE LOST HIS SALTNESSE, WHEREWITH WILL YE SEASON IT ? HAVE SALT IN YOURSELVES, AND HAVE PEACE ONE WITH ANOTHER.—Mark ix. 50.

Two things are here contained :

I. AN OBVIOUS STATEMENT.—“Salt is good.”

1. For seasoning.
2. As a preventive from putrefaction. But if it looses its saline property, nothing is more worthless.

II. A SEASONABLE ADVICE.—It consists of two parts.

1. Personal. “Have salt in yourselves.”

(1.) Sincerity.

(2.) Purity.

2. Relative. “And have peace one with another.”

In order to this—

- (1.) Cultivate a spirit of forbearance and forgiveness.
- (2.) Be clothed with humility.
- (3.) Abstain from evil speaking.

THE BLIND LEADING THE BLIND.

“AND HE SPAKE A PARABLE UNTO THEM, CAN THE BLIND LEAD THE BLIND? SHALL THEY NOT BOTH FALL INTO THE DITCH? THE DISCIPLE IS NOT ABOVE HIS MASTER; BUT EVERY ONE THAT IS PERFECT SHALL BE AS HIS MASTER. AND WHY BEHOLDEST THOU THE MOTE THAT IS IN THY BROTHER’S EYE,” &c.—Luke vi. 39-42.

I. THE SIMILITUDE EMPLOYED.—“Can the blind lead the blind?” Here is—

1. A radical disqualification.
2. A melancholy termination.

II. THE STATEMENT UTTERED.—“The disciple is not above his master; but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.”

1. Thoroughly instructed in the doctrine of Christ.
2. Completely renewed by the grace of Christ.

III. THE CAUTION ADDRESSED.—“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the

mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye." This is called for—

1. On the ground of consistency.

2. The nature of the proposed operation requires it. Being a difficult and delicate thing, it cannot be done unless we see clearly.

THE FULL CORN IN THE EAR.

AND HE SAID, SO IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AS IF A MAN SHOULD CAST SEED INTO THE GROUND; AND SHOULD SLEEP, AND RISE NIGHT AND DAY, AND THE SEED SHOULD SPRING AND GROW UP, HE KNOWETH NOT HOW. FOR THE EARTH BRINGETH FORTH FRUIT OF HERSELF, &c.—Mark iv. 26-29.

I. THE OPERATION PERFORMED.—It furnishes—

1. A familiar and oft-repeated similitude.
2. A person unacquainted with agricultural pursuits would be likely to regard it as a work of folly.
3. In order to its success certain conditions are absolutely necessary.

II. THE RESULTS WHICH FOLLOWED.

1. Their independence of human agency.
2. Their mysteriousness.
3. Their progressive development.
4. Their ultimate perfection.

THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.

HEAR ANOTHER PARABLE: THERE WAS A CERTAIN HOUSEHOLDER, WHICH PLANTED A VINEYARD, AND HEDGED IT ROUND ABOUT, AND DIGGED A WINEPRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER, AND LET IT OUT TO HUSBANDMEN, AND WENT INTO A FAR COUNTRY. AND WHEN THE TIME OF THE FRUIT DREW NEAR, HE SENT HIS SERVANTS TO THE HUSBANDMEN, THAT THEY MIGHT RECEIVE THE FRUITS OF IT. AND THE HUSBANDMEN TOOK HIS SERVANTS, AND BEAT ONE, AND KILLED ANOTHER, AND STONED ANOTHER. AGAIN, HE SENT OTHER SERVANTS MORE THAN THE FIRST; AND THEY DID UNTO THEM LIKEWISE. BUT LAST OF ALL HE SENT UNTO THEM HIS SON, SAYING, THEY WILL REVERENCE MY SON. BUT WHEN THE HUSBANDMEN SAW THE SON, THEY SAID AMONG THEMSELVES, THIS IS THE HEIR, &c.—Matt. xxi. 33-44.

THIS parable was spoken in the temple, and the persons addressed were the chief priests and elders. The Saviour had just been exposing their hypocrisy, and telling them that even the publicans and harlots entered into the kingdom of heaven before them. To be thus denounced in the presence of the people must have been highly galling to their pride; and it would seem that they were about to depart, mortified and confounded, having failed in the object for which they had come together. But our Lord says to them in effect, Do not go away, for I have not yet done with you; I have something further to state, which it is important you should listen to. "Hear another parable;" and as ye hear it, ponder its meaning, and lay its lessons to heart. There is, however, no reason to believe that they did so; it will appear, on the contrary, that they became more exasperated than before, and would at once have resorted to violent measures, were it not that such a step might endanger their own safety. Hence we read at the close

of the chapter: "And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet."

The nature and design of this parable are sufficiently obvious. Indeed the parabolic veil is so slight and transparent, that the truths it contains can hardly be misunderstood. In their historical, doctrinal, and judicial relations, there is so little ambiguity, that he who runs may read. It commences with—

I. A REPRESENTATION OF THE JEWISH CHURCH AS REGARDS ITS PRIVILEGES AND OBLIGATIONS.—"There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country: and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it." In these verses there are several particulars to be noticed.

1. The comparison employed. Palestine abounded in vineyards, and hence the frequent reference that is made to them. Though the country was rocky and mountainous, yet it was peculiarly suited for the growth of vines; and upon their produce the inhabitants depended to a considerable extent for their subsistence and prosperity. It is said that no property was more valuable than a vineyard, but none demanded greater care and labour.

That which is here spoken of was *planted* by a certain householder, which intimates that there was not one on this spot previously. The ground lay waste, or was used for some other purpose, so that he had to expend a considerable amount of capital to bring it under cultivation. Now God often speaks of having planted his ancient people in the land of promise. Originally it was a waste wilderness, but with his outstretched

arm he drove out its idolatrous occupants, and settled his chosen people in their stead to be his peculiar treasure. "Thou hast brought," says the Psalmist, "a vine out of Egypt; thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river." Such, according to this beautiful and graphic picture, was the early condition of the Jewish church. They were the vineyard which the right hand of the Most High had planted; the people whom he had formed for himself, that they might show forth his praise.

It would be in vain to plant a vineyard if it were not enclosed and protected; it is therefore said of this householder, that "he hedged it round about." And such was peculiarly the case with the Jewish church. The natural position of the land of Canaan rendered it difficult of invasion, while a special providence, like a wall of fire, surrounded it through many generations. Its inhabitants were also hedged in and separated from all other nations by their peculiar rites and institutions. These formed a wall of partition which was not taken down until the old economy was finally abolished.

A wine press was also dug, and a tower erected. In short everything that was necessary had been attended to. So God had omitted nothing as regards his chosen people; and hence he asks, "What more could have been done to my vineyard that I have not done to it?"

2. The engagement entered into. It is stated that the householder "let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country." Vineyards were often rented among the Jews, as farms are with us; but while the cultivators of the soil in this country pay the landlord in money, in the East it is often done by allowing him a certain share of the produce. Such a custom is referred to here, as

will more fully appear from what follows. By the husbandmen it is evident that our Lord intended the priests and Levites, together with the various rulers of the Jewish church. To them in a special manner the vineyard was committed. It was their work to cultivate it, to tend the vines, to water them, to prune them, and do all that was necessary for their growth and fruitfulness.

3. The returns anticipated. "And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen that they might receive the fruits of it." Not the whole of the fruits, but the portion which was due to him as proprietor. Those who worked the vineyard were entitled to their share, but for them to keep the entire produce for themselves would be the most flagrant injustice. This, as we shall see, was what they aimed at; they were for ignoring the claims of the owner, and acting as if the vineyard belonged exclusively to them. "Render unto all their due," is a most important precept, and as comprehensive as it is important. Now we cannot render to *all* their due, unless we render to God what is due to him. His claims should have precedence over all others; and if we refuse to render to him our grateful acknowledgments, even the fruits of our lips, and the practical homage of our lives, by abounding in those fruits of righteousness which are to his glory and praise, we defraud him of his rights, and lose sight of the great end of our creation. But in reference to these husbandmen there is set before us—

II. THEIR UNPRINCIPLED DISPOSITION, AND THE MONSTROUS BRUTALITY THEY MANIFESTED.—"And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first; and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir;

come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him."

1. The messengers sent to them, and the manner in which they were treated. In the history of the Jews nothing is more prominent, and nothing more sad to contemplate, than their conduct towards the divinely inspired prophets which appeared among them through successive generations. They were the servants who came seeking fruit, but one after another were opposed and persecuted, and many of them were put to death. In the book of Chronicles we read, "And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy." "Nevertheless," says Nehemiah, "they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations." Elijah had to flee for his life; Jeremiah was thrown into a dungeon, and afterwards stoned to death; Isaiah, according to the Jewish tradition, was sawn asunder. Such was the case, more or less, with the whole of that goodly fellowship; so that Stephen asked with holy indignation, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" Yea, we find our Lord saying only a few days after he delivered this discourse, "Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets." Again, "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from

the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar."

2. The crowning act of clemency on the one hand, and of cruelty on the other. "But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son." The prophets were servants of the Most High God, but here is one who sustains another and far higher relation. In many respects the most eminent of them was Moses, but how does the apostle speak of him in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ? "And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after: but Christ as a Son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." All creatures, however exalted, are servants of the Eternal King; but this was his only begotten Son: and as such partook of the divine nature in a sense in which neither men nor angels can ever be partakers thereof. Now for such a messenger to be sent was a display of condescension and benevolence altogether unparalleled. It might well have been said, therefore, speaking after the manner of men, "They will reverence my Son." It was indeed a most reasonable expectation: but notwithstanding its reasonableness, it was not realized. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not." It was not, however, mere rejection, but malignant and deadly opposition that he encountered. From the people in general such was the treatment he met with; but they were goaded on by their spiritual guides whose animosity was far more bitter against him. Not only had they often smarted under his rebukes, but they perceived that his success lessened their influence, and was likely, ere long, to destroy it altogether. So they said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize

on his inheritance." If they could only get rid of him, they thought they could do as they pleased, and remain in undisturbed possession of those privileges which they had most shamefully perverted and abused.

III. THE AWFUL RETRIBUTION WITH WHICH THEIR ABOMINABLE CONDUCT WAS AT LENGTH VISITED.—“When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their season.” At the close of the chapter, as has been stated already, we are told, “that the chief priests and Pharisees perceived that he spake of them;” but it is evident that as yet they did not see the bearing of the preceding statements. In reply, therefore, to the question which our Lord now addressed to them, they answered, as it were, quite involuntarily, “He will miserably destroy those wicked men.” They thus passed sentence upon themselves, and however unconsciously, admitted beforehand the justice of the doom which would soon befall them. Great had their guilt been, and terrible indeed was their punishment.

Having led them on thus far, the Saviour, in the remaining part of his discourse, proceeds to address them in the most direct and pointed manner. In the concluding verses we have—

1. A striking prediction quoted. “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?” When they had carried their diabolical purpose into execution by putting Jesus to death, they supposed they had made a final end of him and of his cause: but most wofully were they mistaken. The very means which they employed in order to crush him secured the accomplishment of the divine purposes, and laid the foundation of that glorious structure against

which the united opposition of earth and hell will be unavailing. They might kill the heir, yea, get him hanged as a common malefactor ; but what of that ?

“ His cross a sure foundation laid
For glory and renown,
When through the regions of the dead
He passed to reach the crown.”

They might set the stone which God had chosen at nought ; but, notwithstanding their rejection, it became the head of the corner, at once the ornament and stability of the whole building.

2. The important transference declared. “ Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” Such has long been the case, for the Gentiles now occupy the position which once belonged to the Jews. But we are to remember that the condition on which Christian privileges are continued is a proper improvement of them ; and if we do not bring forth fruit, it will be with us even as it was with them. Thus the caution which the apostle gives is by no means uncalled for : “ Be not high-minded, but fear ; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.”

3. A solemn warning uttered. “ And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken ; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” In these words the ruin of all who reject the Son of God is most emphatically declared. To those who embrace him he will be a Saviour ; to those who persist in rebellion against him he will be an avenger. As good old Simeon observed, “ Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against.” In contact with him we shall most assuredly be brought, and it becomes us seriously to inquire whether it is likely to be in judgment or in

mercy. Let us ask ourselves, what are now our feelings towards him, and how we now stand in relation to him." To his people he is the precious corner-stone and the sure foundation, but to his foes a rock of offence and a stone of stumbling.

THE MUSTARD SEED.

AND HE SAID, WHEREUNTO SHALL WE LIKEN THE KINGDOM OF GOD? OR WITH WHAT COMPARISON SHALL WE COMPARE IT? IT IS LIKE A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED, WHICH, WHEN IT IS SOWN IN THE EARTH, IS LESS THAN ALL THE SEEDS, &c.—Mark iv. 30-32.

I. THE PRINCIPLES WHICH THESE WORDS EMBODY.—

1. Original insignificance.
2. Imperceptible progress.
3. Ultimate greatness.

II. THE PURPOSES TO WHICH THEY SHOULD BE APPLIED.—

1. To rectify our judgment. Not to be imposed upon by outward appearances.
2. To strengthen our confidence. It may be now the day of small things.
3. To rebuke our impatience. We must learn to wait.

THE TENDER BRANCH.

NOW LEARN A PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE: WHEN THE BRANCH IS YET TENDER, AND PUTTETH FORTH LEAVES, YE KNOW THAT SUMMER IS NIGH. SO LIKEWISE YE, WHEN YE SHALL SEE ALL THESE THINGS, &c.—Matthew xxiv. 32-35.

I. THE OCCASION ON WHICH THESE WORDS WERE DELIVERED.—It was in reply to the question, “Tell us, when shall these things be?” The subsequent statements evidently refer both to the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world.

II. THE SPECIAL DESIGN CONTEMPLATED.—To furnish certain premonitory indications of what had been foretold. Among such the following are specified:—

1. The appearance of false Christs.
2. National commotions.
3. Religious persecutions.
4. The wide diffusion of the gospel. “When ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.”

III. THE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION ADDUCED.—“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.” This declaration is—

1. Infallibly true.
2. Most emphatic and decisive.
3. Comprehensive and unqualified. “My words”—embracing whatever he has spoken.

THE SERVANT IN THE FIELD.

BUT WHICH OF YOU, HAVING A SERVANT PLOUGHING OR FEEDING CATTLE, WILL SAY UNTO HIM BY-AND-BYE, WHEN HE IS COME FROM THE FIELD, GO AND SIT DOWN TO MEAT? AND WILL NOT RATHER SAY UNTO HIM, MAKE READY WHEREWITH I MAY SUP, AND GIRD HIMSELF, AND SERVE ME, TILL I HAVE EATEN AND DRUNKEN; AND AFTERWARD THOU SHALT EAT AND DRINK. DOETH HE THANK THAT SERVANT BECAUSE HE DID THE THINGS THAT WERE COMMANDED HIM? I TROW NOT. SO LIKEWISE YE, WHEN YE SHALL HAVE DONE ALL THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE COMMANDED YOU, SAY, WE ARE UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS: WE HAVE DONE THAT WHICH WAS OUR DUTY TO DO.—Luke xvii. 7-10.

THERE is here—

I. A FAMILIAR CASE SUPPOSED.—It embraces—

1. The social relations of life.
2. The social duties of life.
3. The social proprieties of life.

II. AN IMPORTANT INFERENCE DEDUCED.—“So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

1. Our services are at best imperfect.

2. It is impossible for us to go beyond our obligations. Hence it follows that we should be ever clothed with humility, and never forget that any reward conferred on us, either here or hereafter, must be altogether of grace.

THE RICH FOOL.

AND HE SPAKE A PARABLE UNTO THEM, SAYING, THE GROUND OF A CERTAIN RICH MAN BROUGHT FORTH PLENTIFULLY: AND HE THOUGHT WITHIN HIMSELF, SAYING, WHAT SHALL I DO, BECAUSE I HAVE NO ROOM WHERE TO BESTOW MY FRUITS? AND HE SAID, THIS WILL I DO: I WILL PULL DOWN MY BARN, AND BUILD GREATER; AND THERE WILL I BESTOW ALL MY FRUITS AND MY GOODS. AND I WILL SAY TO MY SOUL, SOUL, THOU HAST MUCH GOODS LAID UP FOR MANY YEARS: TAKE THINE EASE, EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY. BUT GOD SAID UNTO HIM, THOU FOOL, THIS NIGHT THY SOUL SHALL BE REQUIRED OF THEE: THEN WHOSE SHALL THOSE THINGS BE WHICH THOU HAST PROVIDED? —Luke xii. 16-20.

THERE are several things set forth concerning the individual whose character is here so graphically portrayed.

1. He was a prosperous man. Temporal prosperity is in itself a great blessing; to possess abundance is far preferable to being pinched with poverty and want. And yet prosperity has proved to many an awful snare; it has been, if not the cause, at least the occasion, of their eternal ruin. Hence the innumerable cautions which abound in the holy oracles, wherein the danger of those who are rich in this world is pointed out; of which cautions very many were addressed by the Great Teacher in the exercise of his faithful ministry. We have a memorable instance of this in the parable before us; and what he states about this "certain rich man," while the lessons conveyed are of universal concernment, should be especially laid to heart by those to whom large possessions have been entrusted.

2. He was an ungodly man. We have no reason to conclude that any gross and glaring improprieties marked his character. His riches were not acquired by injustice or extortion. It does not seem that he

oppressed the poor, or kept back by fraud the hire of the labourers who had reaped down his fields. No such charges are brought against him. He might have been a good master, a kind neighbour, and be held in general estimation as a worthy, upright, and honourable man. But notwithstanding all this, he was a godless man; he lived without God in the world. He only speaks of *his* fruits and *his* goods, *his* barns and *his* stores, forgetting that he was only the steward of another; and forgetting also that the increase of his property was altogether owing to the munificent bounty of Him, who has not left himself without witness, but gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. "Give me," says one, "the eye that can see God in all, the hand which can serve God with all, and the heart which can bless God for all." But in the case of this rich man, such an eye, and such a hand, and such a heart, were altogether wanting. Now this is the essence of ungodliness; it is the absence of a devout, and grateful, and habitual recognition of Him, in whom we live, and move, and have our being.

3. He was an earthly-minded man. All his thoughts were of the earth, earthy; his only concern was about his ample goods and treasures. The apostle's description of the enemies of the cross of Christ, that they "mind earthly things," fully applies to him; such things were his all in all. And how many, in this respect, are like him. How many are there on whom the serpent's curse seems to be resting, for their souls cleave to the dust, and they eat it all their days. It has happened to them after the manner of Korah and his company; the earth hath opened her mouth, and swallowed them up; the only difference being, that what was consumed in the one case were the bodies of these rebels, while all the thoughts and feelings, all the powers and energies of the soul, are swallowed up in the other. These make the counting-house their sanctuary,

the Exchange their temple, bank-notes their Bible, and gold their God.

4. He was a sensual man. The ultimate object he had in view, as the result of all his schemes and anxious deliberations, was self-enjoyment, and that of the lowest kind. Not a few of the men of the world, who have their portion in this life, and who live totally regardless of all that extends beyond its narrow bounds, are yet found to indulge in pursuits and to cherish aspirations, which in many respects are dignified and praiseworthy. There is an honourable ambition, "that last infirmity of noble minds." In all that relates to philosophical investigations, and scientific discoveries, and political and social questions, there is much that is worthy of, and that will yield back an ample reward to, the efforts of intelligent beings. But here was a man who looked forward to nothing higher than the gratification of his bodily appetites: according to him the *summum bonum* of existence was to take his ease, to eat, drink, and be merry.

5. He was a presumptuous man. Upon that which is of all things the most uncertain, he calculated with the fullest confidence. He never dreamt that anything could mar his happy state; that anything could ever interfere with such fair and fond expectations. He had much goods laid up for many years, and on the strength of his great possessions, he was determined to enjoy himself. But how was his arrogance and infatuation rebuked, when the voice from heaven proclaimed, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

In the remainder of this discourse we shall confine ourselves more especially to these arousing words. May we ponder them with becoming seriousness, and may what they contain sink deep into our hearts! We observe—

I. THAT THE REQUIREMENT HERE MADE IS ONE THAT IS

TRULY SOLEMN AND MOMENTOUS.—“Thy soul shall be required of thee.” What is here assumed, namely, that man has a soul, is admitted by all ; and yet few seem to realize the important truth, their whole conduct being in direct contradiction to such an acknowledgment. Indeed is there not much to lead us to question whether the fact is really believed by the majority of our fellow-creatures. It is with this, as with many other subjects, that of death for example. The wise man declares, that “the living know that they must die ;” but at times we are almost tempted to deny the truth of the statement. Were we to judge of men by their actions, at what conclusion should we arrive ? Their eager pursuit of the transitory enjoyments of the present life ; their entire neglect of preparation for a dying hour, and their habitual inattention to the vast concerns of a succeeding eternity : to reconcile such a course with the possession of such knowledge, certainly seems, at first-sight, to be a very difficult undertaking.

But there is a spirit in man, though the profound indifference that exists in reference to the subject, is truly appalling. That spirit is divine in its origin ; for “God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” It is, above all, a spirit that is deathless in its duration ; it will live “when rolling years shall cease to move.” The most obscure and insignificant among us is an immortal creature. The impress of that high attribute is indelibly stamped upon us all.

“’Tis immortality our nature solves,
’Tis immortality deciphers man,
And opens all the mysteries of his make :
Without it, half his instincts are a riddle ;
Without it, all his virtues are a dream.”

The fact, then, that this requirement refers to the undying spirit with which we are endowed, shows at

once how solemn and momentous it is. Many other important requirements are often made; but what are they when compared with this? Our presence is frequently, under highly critical circumstances, required. So with our testimony, our service, our property. All such demands, however, are nothing, and less than nothing, in comparison with that which is spoken of in these words.

In order to realise its importance, it will be necessary for us to consider the circumstances under which it will be made. "Thy soul shall be required of thee;" but required by whom? It will be required by Him whom thou hast so ungratefully forgotten, whose claims thou hast altogether disregarded, whose laws thou hast broken, whose authority thou hast despised, and whose name thou hast not glorified. And for what purpose will it be required? It will be in order to call it to a strict account; for it will have to answer at the dread tribunal before which it will be summoned for all its delinquencies, and then be visited with the righteous vengeance which those delinquencies have deserved.

That there will be a solemn reckoning between the soul and God, is a truth which reason and revelation alike confirm. The long controversy that has been carried on will be brought to a final settlement when they meet. And those who have been led in any measure to a consciousness of their sinful condition, and who at the same time have every reason to conclude that their sins are unpardoned, and the burden of their guilt unremoved, may well anticipate the great day of decision with the most gloomy apprehensions. Some there have been, it is true, who in their pride and presumption on the one hand, and their ignorance of the divine claims on the other, have pretended to look forward to God's bar, with feelings of the utmost complacency and self-esteem. A most melancholy example we have of this in the case of Rousseau, the continental sceptic. In a work entitled

his "Confessions," he made use of the following language. "Whenever the last trumpet shall sound, I will present myself before the sovereign Judge, with this book in my hand, and will loudly proclaim, Thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I, Power eternal! Assemble round thy throne the innumerable throng of my fellow-mortals. Let them listen to my confessions; let them blush at my depravity; let them tremble at my sufferings; let each in his turn expose, with equal sincerity, the failings of his own heart; and aver, if he dare, I was better than that man." Oh, what blindness, what vanity, what insufferable arrogance, are here displayed! Poor, deluded creature! he knew not what manner of spirit he was of, or he would have sunk into the profoundest depths of self-abasement; and instead of expecting the approval of his offended Maker by such a confession, so revolting in its pride, and so daring in its impiety, his cry would have been, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified."

Had man kept his first estate, and continued to wear the crown of innocence with which he was originally adorned, in being called to appear before God there would have been no occasion for any alarm. Where there is no guilt there is no danger, and where there is no danger there need be no fear. And so in like manner with those who, though they have sinned against God, are yet reconciled to him, and whose multiplied transgressions are graciously pardoned by him. All such, being restored to his friendship and favour, will meet him with joy, and not with grief. Just as it is at the assizes. Its approach causes no terror to those who have led a quiet and peaceable life, in all uprightness and honesty. But how different with those who have violated their country's laws! The poor creatures in prison, when they hear the bells ringing to intimate that the judges are about entering the town; when they listen to the sounding of the trumpets, and catch, in their silent dun-

geons, the distant echoes produced by the marching of the assembled crowds—what are their feelings then? To the general inhabitants, the entrance of the judges, and the processions of the civic authorities, and the bells, and the music, and the pressing into the courts, and all the excitement which prevails, instead of filling their minds with fear, is to them, on the contrary, a source of gratification and delight. And so with the great assize. To angels who have known no sin, and to men who have been saved from sin, the bursting tombs, and the agonies of dissolving nature, and the shrill tones of the last trump, and the opening heavens, and the descending Judge, surrounded by his royal guards, and the setting up of the throne, and the opening of the books, and the passing of the sentences, and all the dread proceedings of that great day—to such this will cause no alarm, but undescribable rapture. But with the unpardoned sinner, how different will it be! What confusion will cover him; what horror and despair will seize upon him! To him it will truly be, “the great and terrible day of the Lord:” the day of the manifestation of righteous vengeance and fiery indignation.

The summons before us refers, it is true, not to the day of judgment, but to the day of death. The difference, however, between them will not be very material. The sentence passed on the one occasion will be only the public confirmation of that which was passed on the other. Both, as regards consequences, will be the same. As death leaves us, so the judgment will find us. As the tree falls, so it will lie. “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.”

II. THAT THIS REQUIREMENT, SO SOLEMN AND MOMENTOUS, MAY BE MADE AT A SEASON ALTOGETHER UNEXPECTED.—Such a season it evidently was in the case before us. Many thoughts filled the mind of this individual, but none of

them had any reference to the unspeakably important event which awaited him. My stores, he said, are greatly increased, and for their reception I will set about at once to prepare ample accommodation. When that is done I am determined to take my ease, and indulge myself in real earnest. What is life worth, but for a man to enjoy the good of all his labour which he doeth under the sun? Let others mope and be melancholy; I am of a different turn. Dull care shall be banished; and as for the morrow, it shall be as to-day, and much more abundant. Such were his musings; but how soon did it appear that they were all visionary and vain. While he was planning thus, and looking forward with full confidence and self-complacent satisfaction to the time when his fondest wishes would be realised, a voice was heard, solemn in its tone, and absolute in its authority, which upset and blasted all. "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

Many other instances might be adduced in confirmation of the solemn fact we are considering. Take the well-known case of Belshazzar. Let us enter his palace in Babylon on that festive evening, when he and one thousand of his lords gave themselves to the most unbounded gratifications. To add profanity to his sensuality, the impious monarch commanded his servants to bring in the golden vessels which had been taken from the temple at Jerusalem; and he, with his lords and concubines, drank wine in them, and praised the gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. But no sooner had the cups began to pass round from one to another, than the king's attention was arrested by a circumstance most strange and appalling. An unknown hand was seen moving immediately before him on the plaster of the wall, writing the mystic words, MENE, MENE, TEKEL UPHARSIN.

Their revelry is at once at an end. Instead of the mirth and music, deep silence reigned throughout that stately hall. Fear was written on every countenance. And as to the king himself, so great was his consternation, that the joints of his loins were loosed, and his knees smote against each other. His guilty conscience at once told him that it was a message from the invisible world, and he felt assured that it foreboded some terrible calamity. His most fearful apprehensions were verified. The mysterious inscription was explained to him, and the spirit of its meaning was—"Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" And it was so. In that self-same night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain, and Darius the Median took the kingdom, and reigned in his stead.

But it is not necessary to multiply examples, which might be done to any extent. That the summons has, in innumerable cases, come suddenly, none can deny; and so it may come to us. We know not when it will arrive—what week, what day, what hour, what moment. Wherever we are, at home or from home, we are continually exposed to danger and to death. Accident, in one or other of its countless forms, may assail us. A little spark may kindle the midnight conflagration, and the house with all its inmates are reduced to dust and ashes. A stroke of lightning may arrest the current of life in a single twinkling. A gust of wind may upset the vessel and lay its unwary passengers in a watery grave. But to say nothing of what are called accidents, may not an exposure to the inclemency of the weather confine us to our dwellings, and lay us on the bed of our last sickness? May not the cold of a few days settle into a disease from which we shall never recover? May not an attack of fever hurry from the land of the living, with fearful rapidity, the very strongest of us all?

Ten thousand messengers are waiting every moment to execute the dread decree; the order has only to be given, and it is at once obeyed. Yea, the union between soul and body may be severed without any assignable cause, as far as outward means and agencies are concerned. The cord of life may any instant be snapped asunder, and cut down by an invisible hand, we may expire without a struggle or a groan; while a jury, after being summoned on the occasion, shall pronounce the verdict, Died by the visitation of God!

It is a pleasing thought that to the true Christian, sudden death is sudden glory. This moment he is conversing with men; the next in the presence of Christ, of angels, of perfected saints, of the whole general assembly and church of the first-born above. This moment he is toiling and struggling with the world, oppressed with its cares, and it may be suffering its privations; the next eternally freed from all its sorrows, his weary soul enjoying the promised rest, where it is enriched with all the treasures of heaven, and filled with all the fulness of God. This moment in the furnace of affliction, enduring some heavy trial, by which his days are made sad and his nights sleepless; the next in those blest regions where sighing and mourning are unknown, and of whose inhabitants it is said that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

While touching upon this subject we cannot refrain from mentioning the case of the dying thief, which affords a most memorable instance, not only of a sudden removal to the world of bliss, but also of sudden preparation for it. When led out of prison to be condemned, he was, it seems, a hardened wretch; so much so, that he joined with his fellow-malefactor in reviling the Saviour, it being stated that "the thieves which

were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." But in the course of a few hours he becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus, giving the clearest evidence that he was a humble penitent, a genuine, enlightened, yea, eminent believer. And before the evening lights were kindled in Jerusalem, he was a holy, happy spirit in heaven. That very day, according to the promise of Him by whom he had been snatched as a brand from the burning, he appeared with his gracious deliverer in paradise. O stupendous changes! O surpassingly wondrous transitions! To be thus so quickly transformed from nature to grace, and then to be so quickly wafted from grace to glory!

But while such is the case in reference to the Christian, how dreadful will the summons be to the impenitent and unbelieving. Now they are at ease in their possessions; anon tossed in burning flames. Now feasting upon the richest luxuries; anon deprived of all, even of a drop of water to cool their tongues. "And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom; and he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame." Such is the awful termination of the sinner's course, and it is a termination that may come at any moment. There is but a single step between him and death, even the death that never dies. O awake then, from your infatuated slumbers awake; and let the voice from heaven be pondered as a solemn warning, that it may not be heard by you as a dread summons, a summons to which resistance will be impossible, and which in its execution will admit of no delay. But we proceed to observe, in the last place—

III. THAT WHEN THIS IMPORTANT REQUIREMENT IS MADE, WHITHER SUDDENLY OR OTHERWISE, ALL EARTHLY GOOD WILL BE FOR EVER UNAVAILING.—"What," asks the

patriarch, "is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?" Yes, though he hath gained; though his ground hath brought forth plentifully; though his barns are too small and necessity is laid upon him to build larger; yet what is his hope, whether a nominal professor or an avowed worldling, when his soul is required of him? A person once said on his death-bed, "I have gained thirty thousand pounds." A very decent sum, many may be disposed to remark; it is only the lot of comparatively few to be so successful. But there was something he lost as well as gained; and it is usual to place the losses and the gains one against the other. "I have gained," was his language, "thirty thousand pounds; *but* I have lost my soul." These were the two sides of the balance sheet, which, at the close of life, he was making up: thirty thousand pounds on the one side, the soul lost on the other. The separate items on both sides of the sheet might have been numerous. He did not gain the sum specified all at once, nor was the soul lost at once. But the winding up of the whole affair, after adding to this, and deducting from that, presented the conclusion which has been given. But was it a good speculation? We would put the question to you as men of judgment, of practical wisdom, of cool and calculating habits, who can turn a matter over, looking first at one side and then at the other, and ask you whether you think it really was? But whatever your opinion may be, we have the verdict of One whose competency to judge in such a case none can question. His language is, "What shall it profit a man if he gain"—not thirty thousand pounds, but—"the whole world, and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

O ye men of the world, be assured that riches profit not in the day of wrath, however they may profit now. After all your gains you will be wretched bankrupts, insolvents through all eternity, if you live and die des-

titute of the durable riches and righteousness. We must tell you, that your gold has no currency in the country to which you are so rapidly travelling ; and if it were current there, you would be no better off, for none of it can you take with you. When you come to the dividing stream you will find that all earthly treasures are there contraband articles ; you will find when you enter death's ferry-boat that not one single jot of all you so dearly prize, will you be allowed even to smuggle over with you. Cast a longing, lingering look at them you may, but turning your eyes away for the last time, you will be brought to see and feel, that naked came you out of your mother's womb, and that naked, even as a new-born babe, shall you return thither. Concerning the whole of your wealth you will have to exclaim with one of old, and that with a consciousness which nothing can refute, " All this availeth me nothing."

But in bringing our observations to a close, we would ask, with what feelings would the summons before us be regarded were it now addressed to you ? If a voice from yonder lofty canopy uttered the words this moment, would they not cause your face to turn pale, and would not the joints of your loins be loosed, and your knees smite one against the other ? But it may be so. What a day may bring forth we know not. In the midst of life we are in death. Oh beware, then, of that presumptuous spirit which this narrative so solemnly and impressively reproves ; and oh, talk not of years, of many years yet to come, lest God should proclaim in tones of stern and indignant rebuke, " Thou fool, this *night* thy soul shall be required of thee ; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?"

It is, however, as an impressive warning that we wish you to regard the words at present ; and were you thus to regard them, you would be likely to be brought thereby to attend to the concern of your souls as the chiefest of all concerns. The rich man of whom the

Saviour speaks, neglected his soul ; and this was the very head and front of his offending. An infinite mercy will it be if from his folly you are led to apply your hearts unto wisdom ; for as none are truly rich but those who are rich toward God, so none are truly wise but those who are made wise unto salvation.

We would not have you by any means to neglect your temporal interests. As a matter of course your bodies have to be cared for ; but while you care for the perishing body, should you not also care for your never-dying souls ? But we greatly fear that with many of you, your anxieties have been hitherto respecting the former, to the total exclusion of the latter. And if you continue thus a little longer, what sad complaints will your poor soul have to make, when you are stretched upon the bed of your last sickness ! Its language will be, Thou hast been faithful to all but to me. The world has received every attention, but no attention has been bestowed upon me. Every day hast thou been concerned about the body, but never, for one single hour, hast thou been concerned about me. What anxiety hast thou shown that it should be regularly fed and comfortably clothed, but all thy life long thou hast been starving me. Although spiritual food and spiritual raiment have been provided, yet thou hast kept them all from me. No hidden manna hast thou sought for me ; no waters of salvation, not a single drop of that river which makes glad the city of God, hast thou ever brought to me. And although thou hast so frequently heard of the fine linen, clean and white, which is the righteousness of saints, yet thou hast never made the least effort to procure that spotless robe for me. And here I am, with all my spiritual nakedness exposed, and all my wants unprovided for, just going to be turned adrift upon the cheerless wastes of a desolate and undone eternity. God preserve us from being the subjects, on our dying beds, of such terrible reproaches as these !

CHILDREN IN THE MARKET PLACE.

BUT WHEREUNTO SHALL I LIKEN THIS GENERATION? IT IS LIKE UNTO CHILDREN SITTING IN THE MARKETS, AND CALLING UNTO THEIR FELLOWS, AND SAYING, WE HAVE PIPED UNTO YOU, AND YE HAVE NOT DANCED; WE HAVE MOURNED UNTO YOU, AND YE HAVE NOT LAMENTED. FOR JOHN CAME NEITHER EATING NOR DRINKING, AND THEY SAY, HE HATH A DEVIL. THE SON OF MAN CAME EATING AND DRINKING, AND THEY SAY, BEHOLD A MAN GLUTTONOUS AND A WINE-BIBBER, A FRIEND OF PUBLICANS AND SINNERS. BUT WISDOM IS JUSTIFIED OF HER CHILDREN.—Mat. xi. 16-19.

FROM the preceding verses we find that our Lord had been speaking to the people concerning John the Baptist. There are several things pertaining to that eminent individual which are worthy of special notice, such as the following:

1. His personal qualities. He was a man of inflexible integrity, being determined to do what was right, altogether regardless of consequences.

2. His arousing and successful ministry. From his first public appearance he drew vast crowds around him, and through his faithful reproofs and exhortations very many were turned unto righteousness.

3. His being the subject of ancient prophecy. On no other prophet was this high honour conferred. Nor was it a mere incidental allusion that was made to him, for there are no less than three express predictions in which his coming was foretold.

4. Above all, he was the immediate harbinger of the Messiah. It was his special work to prepare the way of the Lord, and announce not only the approach, but actually to introduce, the consolation of Israel.

The words before us are closely connected with the preceding statements, and relate both to the Saviour's

ministry and that of his forerunner. We have to notice—

I. THE COMPARISON EMPLOYED.—“But whereunto shall I like this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.”

1. The custom to which this passage refers. It is that of children playing in the market-place. Little ones often amuse themselves by imitating what is done by their elders. It would seem that the allusion here is to marriage festivities on the one hand, and funeral lamentations on the other. Calvin observes, “that Christ intentionally borrowed from children the materials of his reproof, in order to abase the pride of the scribes: thus declaring that, however distinguished they were, nothing more was necessary to condemn them than the songs which children were wont to sing for their amusement.”

2. The special charge it embodies. When several children are together it is no unusual thing for some, from perverseness or ill-humour, to refuse to join with the rest in their sports. In the case supposed the success of the game depended upon the co-operation of all the company; but the complaint is that a number of them would not take part in the ceremonies; they would not dance while the others were piping, nor lament while the others were mourning. Such were the men of that generation: they were morose, sullen, censorious, intractable, and altogether unreasonable.

II. THE CONFIRMATION ADDUCED.—“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” We see here—

1. That God’s messengers are marked by great personal diversities. One is retired, while another is more

social. In John there was much of the recluse, and his habits were highly abstemious; but our Lord, it seems, practised no unusual austerity. He ate and drank what was common among his countrymen; but to accuse him with indulging in excess, and delighting in the company of the ungodly, was a charge as abominable as it was unfounded.

2. That in the exhibition of truth, prominence is given by some to its more winning, and by others to its more arousing aspects. There are sons of consolation and sons of thunder, and both are necessary. The terrors of the Lord should be proclaimed, as well as the free grace and mercy of the gospel.

3. That divine truth, whether set forth in its inviting or alarming features, and whether announced by those whose temperament is austere or affable, often fails to silence the cavils and subdue the stubbornness of men. It is the message itself that sinners hate; a hatred that they attempt to conceal by objecting to the manner in which it is presented. Nothing is more certain than that those who indulge in a cavilling disposition are destitute of a saving knowledge of the word of life, for such a temper is altogether opposed to what is there enjoined.

III. THE CHEERING ASSURANCE THAT IS GIVEN.—“But wisdom is justified of her children.” Two remarks are suggested by this statement.

1. That it is an indication of the highest spiritual discernment to acquiesce in, and devoutly to commend and admire the divine arrangements. We read concerning David on one occasion, “that whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.” So should it be with us in reference to the heavenly King. Instead of finding fault with any of the methods he has thought proper to employ, we should be fully satisfied therewith, and do our utmost to carry them into execution.

2. That the approbation of the wise and good is an ample compensation for the dissatisfaction of others.

“That must be a good religion,” some one observed, “which so bad a man as Nero was the first to persecute.” In like manner to incur the censures of the ungodly, far from being a reproach, is in reality a distinguished honour. Be it ours so to conduct ourselves as to secure the good opinion of the excellent of the earth, for their esteem is truly a precious treasure.

THE TWO SONS.

BUT WHAT THINK YE? A CERTAIN MAN HAD TWO SONS; AND HE CAME TO THE FIRST, AND SAID, SON, GO WORK TO-DAY IN MY VINEYARD. HE ANSWERED AND SAID, I WILL NOT: BUT AFTERWARD HE REPENTED, AND WENT. AND HE CAME TO THE SECOND, AND SAID LIKEWISE. AND HE ANSWERED AND SAID, I GO, SIR: AND WENT NOT. WHETHER OF THEM TWAIN DID THE WILL OF HIS FATHER? THEY SAY UNTO HIM, THE FIRST. JESUS SAITH UNTO THEM, VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT THE PUBLICANS AND THE HARLOTS GO INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD BEFORE YOU. FOR JOHN CAME UNTO YOU IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND YE BELIEVED HIM NOT; BUT THE PUBLICANS AND THE HARLOTS BELIEVED HIM: AND YE, WHEN YE HAD SEEN IT, REPENTED NOT AFTERWARD, THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE HIM.—Mat. xxi. 28-32.

THE great Teacher possessed in the highest degree what he promised to give his disciples, namely, “a mouth and wisdom which all their adversaries would not be able to gainsay or resist.” That he was more than a match for the cunning and malicious enemies with whom he had to contend, who were endeavouring in every way to entangle him in his talk, the gospel narratives furnish abundant proof. The questions proposed to him were exceedingly artful and ensnaring, as when he was asked, “Is it lawful to pay tribute unto Cæsar?” If he had said it was *not* lawful, he would have been accused as a sower of sedition, one who incited a spirit of revolt among the people, for which he would no doubt have been at once arrested by the civil authorities. On the other hand, if he had said that it *was* lawful, the mob might have laid violent hands upon him, for the great mass of the Jews submitted most unwillingly to the Roman yoke, and hated those who ruled over them with a deep and growing hatred. Even if they did not rise up against him, and tear him to pieces, the mere

fact of his having given expression to so unpopular an opinion, would have much gratified these wily foes, for they would thus be able to lower his character by making it known that he sided with their oppressors, and was an enemy to the rights and liberties of his countrymen. But wise as they were, or supposed themselves to be, they were taken in their own craftiness. After asking them to show him a penny, he inquired whose image and superscription it bore; and on being told it was Cæsar's, he said, "Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's, and unto God the things which are God's." Seeing how completely they were done, how easily and yet how triumphantly their artifice was exposed and their object defeated, abashed and mortified, they skulked away.

We have a similar instance of his skill in the preceding context. In the case to which we have been referring, his enemies intended to fix him in a dilemma, and thought they were sure of their purpose whatever his reply might be. An answer in the negative or affirmative would have equally suited and gratified him. But here he places them in a difficulty, a difficulty from which they could not escape but by confessing their ignorance. "And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or from men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say to us, Why did ye then not believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people, for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things."

But while they refused to say whether John's ministry was from God or not, our Saviour determines the case, and charges them with having opposed the divinely authorised mission of his forerunner. This he does in the words before us, where their conduct is contrasted with that of the lowest and most disreputable in the land. Upon publicans and other notorious sinners they looked down with proud contempt: they regarded them as special objects of the displeasure of the Most High, and said of them, "This people who knoweth not the law are cursed." How confounded, how irritated must they therefore have felt on being assured, that even such abandoned characters entered the kingdom of heaven before them!

Let us now attend to the startling and somewhat peculiar representation which our Lord gave on this occasion. And in the first place we notice—

I. THE CASE WHICH IS HERE PRESENTED.—In some respects it is similar to that of another parable, the memorable one recorded by Luke in the latter part of the fifteenth chapter of his gospel. We have an account in both of a certain father who had two sons; and by the brothers in both instances the same classes are evidently intended. At the same time the narratives differ considerably, and the one is much fuller than the other. But this, however brief, is worthy of being seriously pondered. It contains—

1. An important command. "But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard." We see—

(1.) What is required. It is work; and no requirement is more imperative, more universal, more necessary, and, it can be safely affirmed, more merciful. He is perhaps of all men the most wretched who has nothing to do. Happiness and indolence are altogether incompatible, and that as regards beings of every rank and condition, even from the lowest to the highest.

“An angel’s wing would droop if long at rest,
And God himself, inactive, were no longer blest.”

“By the rabbinical law,” says one, “all Jews were taught a trade. One rabbi had said, that he who did not teach his son a trade, instructed him to steal. It was also the custom of the monastic institutions to compel every brother to work, not only for the purpose of supporting the monastery, but also to prevent the entrance of evil thoughts. A wise lesson! For in a life like ours, woe to those who have nothing to do. Misery to him or her who emancipates himself or herself from the universal law, ‘In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread.’ Evil thoughts, despondency, sensual feelings, sin in every shape is before him, to beset and madden, often to ruin him.”

But important as secular work is, and valuable as a preservative from many evils, that of which we have now to speak is of a different character, as will appear from the next particular.

(2.) The sphere of labour. By the similitude which is here used, that of a vineyard, the church is evidently intended. This sufficiently indicates the nature of the employment to which we are called. It may be viewed in a twofold aspect, namely, in relation to our own spiritual well-being, and the efforts we should put forth in seeking to be useful to our fellow-creatures. As regards the former, we are exhorted to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, and to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure. On this subject we have line upon line, precept upon precept; but there is one statement which may be regarded as embracing all that is necessary in order to our present peace and our eternal welfare. “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. Then

said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." Whichever is the first and great commandment of the law, this most assuredly is the first and great commandment of the gospel. It is to receive the testimony of Christ, to apply as perishing sinners to him for pardon and acceptance, and, as the result of this divine principle, to bring forth the fruits of righteousness, striving against sin as our greatest foe, and aspiring after all holiness, both of heart and of life, as our highest and noblest attainment.

But in addition to this, working in the vineyard includes active exertion in promoting the interests of the Redeemer's cause. And what an unspeakable honour is it to be thus engaged! It is to be fellow-labourers with God himself, and that in the most important and glorious of all his works. To have been employed as instruments in creating the world, or in upholding and governing the world, would be looked upon as a great thing; but how much greater is it to be employed as instruments in saving the world! Creation and providence, notwithstanding their wonderful display of the divine perfections, are so eclipsed by redemption, that we are told, "the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." This was the work of God that especially engaged his thoughts in those eternal purposes which were formed before time began, and for its accomplishment he sent his only begotten Son to suffer and to die. Yea, it is emphatically called "the *pleasure* of the Lord," implying that none of his operations afford him such satisfaction as that which is derived from this source. He has pleasure in every exercise of his divine skill and energy; in replenishing the empty regions of space with worlds and systems, and peopling them with intelligent and happy beings; in surveying the hosts and hierarchies which surround his throne, and receiving from them

pure and fervent adorations: but while all these afford him pleasure, it is on another scene that his eye rests with supreme interest and ineffable delight. The recovery of apostate creatures from the ruins of the fall, is not merely a pleasure to the Lord, but it is pre-eminently *the* pleasure of the Lord; and nothing else gratifies his compassionate yearnings in comparison therewith. Even when one poor sinner is brought to repentance, he rejoices over him with transporting joy, saying, "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And while the Father beholds, in the returning prodigal, the fruit of his eternal love, the blessed Redeemer, feeling what no words can express, there sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied; and the rapture extends through the whole of the celestial ranks, for "so great is the joy that," in the language of Jeremy Taylor, "its runs over and wets the fair brows and beauteous locks of cherubim and seraphim, and all the angels have a part of that banquet." How high the privilege, then, for us to be permitted to do aught in connection with so great and glorious a work! Surely no honour can be compared with that of being employed, as humble instruments, in converting sinners from the error of their ways, saving precious souls from death, and covering thereby a multitude of sins.

(3.) The period specified. "Son, go work *to-day* in my vineyard." The king's business requires haste, and this is the business of the King of kings. When there is anything important to be done, and only a limited time for doing it, it is necessary above all things that we should set about it at once. There are many who purpose doing this thing and the other, but notwithstanding their good intentions, they allow one opportunity to pass away after another, and thus their lives are wasted, the talents committed to them are unimproved, and death comes and finds them truly unprofitable servants, not having done that which was their

duty to do. Whatever the field of usefulness which we are called by divine providence to cultivate, whether it be a sabbath class, or a ragged school, or a cottage prayer-meeting, or a district for domiciliary visitation, to say nothing of more extensive and public spheres, let us act upon the precept, "What thou doest, do quickly." Unless we are prompt in undertaking the duties of our Christian calling, and diligent and unwearied in their accomplishment, it will not be for us, as we lay our heads upon our dying pillow, to look upward and say in the words of the great Master, "I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

But the scope of this parable seems to indicate that the work more immediately referred to, is that of our own personal salvation. And if any matter ever demanded instant attention, most assuredly it is this. The language of the great enemy of souls is—"to-morrow;" but the language of God is—"to-day." When he calls upon us to repent and believe the gospel, to seek his face and turn from the evil of our doings, to flee from the wrath to come and lay hold upon the hope set before us, we should at once hear and obey his voice. The Psalmist says, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments;" and how important is it that we should imitate his example. Procrastination is fearfully perilous; for, as an old writer remarks, "If God's to-day be too soon for thy repentance, thy to-morrow may be too late for his acceptance."

Having thus enlarged upon the command which is here addressed, we have now to notice what is stated concerning—

2. The manner in which it was treated. By neither of the two sons was it properly responded to; but it will be seen that the one was far more culpable than the other. In the case of the first we have—

(1.) A rude refusal, followed however by an agree-

able change. "He answered and said, I will not ; but afterward he repented, and went." The class which this son represents are the openly wicked, those bold, shameless, profligate ones, who sin as it were with a cart rope, and do evil with both hands earnestly. When the divine claims are urged upon them, their daring and determined reply is, with the rebellious Jews of old, "As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee." Yea, so completely have they cast off all fear, that they say unto God, even to Him with whom is terrible majesty, at whose rebuke the mountains quake, and the pillars of heaven tremble, "Depart from us ; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

These are the stout-hearted, who are far from righteousness, and who are often looked upon as altogether hopeless. But however sad it is to contemplate such characters, yet notwithstanding their recklessness, not a few even of these have been brought to a better state of mind. Some awful dispensation of providence has stopped them in their mad career, or under an arousing ministry, like that of John the Baptist, the arrows of conviction, directed and applied by the all-quickening Spirit, have entered into their souls. Thus awakened, they are led to ponder their evil ways ; and when "consideration like an angel came," they have been overwhelmed and confounded at their former impiety. Prostrate in the dust of self-abasement, they have bitterly bewailed their folly, and turned to Him whom they had so grievously offended, with full purpose of heart. Fruits meet for repentance are brought forth ; and after being so active in the service of sin and Satan, they henceforth serve the Lord in newness of life.

(2.) A ready and respectful assent, but the promise so promptly made was shamefully broken. "And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, Sir ; and went not." While the former

son represents profligate sinners, this represents pretending saints; a class that was exceedingly numerous in the time of Christ, and whom he unsparingly exposed. Notwithstanding their strict ceremonial observances, their frequent fastings and long prayers, the profession of the scribes and Pharisees was to the last degree, hollow and hypocritical. Their extraordinary devotion was only assumed; for while they made clean the outside of the cup and the platter, within they were full of all vileness and extortion.

A profession of religion is one of the divine requirements, and those who refuse to confess the Saviour before men will be disowned by him before his Father and the holy angels. The fact then that wicked men have assumed the garb of piety, is no reason why we should keep aloof from identifying ourselves with the people of God. Some indeed go so far as to regard all religious pretensions as a certain indication of hypocrisy; but such a conclusion is most unfair and unwarrantable. If some are false, it surely does not follow that all are. "As to the insinuation," it has been well observed, "of general hypocrisy, when some specious professor stands unmasked before the world, how absurd is it! Is there no grain in our barn-yards because there is so much chaff? Are all patriots, Wallace, Tell, Russell, Washington, deceivers and liars, because some have villainously betrayed their country? Is there no bright honour in the army, because some soldiers, the sweepings probably of our city streets, have left the lines, and leapt the trenches, and deserted to the enemy? Is there no such virtue as integrity among British merchants, because now and then we hear of a fraudulent bankruptcy? And because some religious professors prove hypocrites, is therefore all ardent piety hollow hypocrisy? To reason so argues either a disordered intellect, or a very depraved heart."

But the special truth brought before us here is, that

mere profession will be of no avail, unless our conduct corresponds therewith. Those who honour God with their lips, while they disregard his statutes and break his laws, should remember that they have to do with a Being who requires truth in the inward parts, a Being who is not to be deceived by fair speeches, nor mocked by any outward show. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." It is well to say, "I go, sir:" but if we have no intention of acting accordingly we lie, and that not unto men, but unto God.

II. THE APPLICATION WHICH IS HERE MADE.—It is contained in the last two verses, which embrace the following particulars:

1. The question proposed. "Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first." And in saying so, they answered right. Both sons, as we have already observed, were highly culpable; but still the latter is not to be compared with the former. Notwithstanding his rude refusal, his actions were better than his words, and his end than his beginning. Far preferable is it to be a late penitent than an old and confirmed formalist. The condition of those, whatever their previous course may have been, who are awakened to a sense of their guilt and danger, who possess a broken heart and a contrite spirit, and in whom the fruits of true penitence appear, is unspeakably more desirable than the condition of such as have only the form of godliness, while destitute of its saving power. None are in so fearful a state as the class of whom the apostle speaks, when he says, "They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

2. The startling truth declared. They who gave the above answer did not perceive how it applied to, and

testified against themselves. Our Lord, therefore, instead of continuing to speak to them in an indirect manner, brings the subject home in words so explicit, as to render it impossible for them to misunderstand or evade his meaning. "Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you." To the wisdom and matchless skill of the great Teacher we have already adverted; here we see how fearless and how faithful he was in his addresses. But however severe many of his sayings may appear to be, yet he never spoke at random; his words were always words of truth and soberness. Hence we have—

3. The solemn charge substantiated. "For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him." There is here an appeal to the most notorious and undeniable facts. By the Pharisees the ministry of John was rejected; they received not his witness, as they received not the witness of him whose way he came to prepare. But the publicans and harlots listened to his warning voice, and gave earnest heed to his arousing appeals and exhortations. They believed him, and so believed that the change produced in them was apparent to every observer. Those whom the Saviour now rebukes saw it; but notwithstanding the astonishing spectacle, a spectacle so cheering and convincing, they believed not in him whose claims they had hitherto refused to acknowledge as divine.

In conclusion, we see from this subject that we should not despair of the most abandoned sinners. Hardened as they now are, they may yet, through the mighty power of Him with whom nothing is impossible, be brought to repentance. Instances in abundance are recorded which show that we ought not to say concern-

ing any poor creature, "There is no hope;" our language should rather be, "Who can tell?" Of that bold blasphemer, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, it may yet be said, "Behold he prayeth." That ruthless persecutor whose heart overflows with enmity, and whose feet are swift to shed blood, may have his stubborn will subdued, and be heard inquiring, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Such are the wonders of almighty grace, that many a lion has been turned before now into a lamb; and they whose filthy abominations were a disgrace to our common humanity, yea, who indulged in such vile enormities as were sufficient to cause even demons to shudder, have notwithstanding been washed, and justified, and sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. Let us, therefore, be encouraged and stimulated in seeking the salvation of the most wretched outcasts, and the most notorious offenders. We may, it is true, have many difficulties to contend with, and much opposition to encounter. Still let us not be weary in well-doing, for the sure promise is given, that in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

On the other hand, this subject shows that formal, self-satisfied, high-minded professors may well tremble. According to the testimony of Jesus himself, there is more ground for hope as regards publicans and harlots, than there is concerning them. Their lives may be outwardly decent, so much so, as to enable them to thank God that they are not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers: but after all, their self-righteous goodness is a greater obstacle, a more formidable barrier in blocking up the way to heaven, than the most gross and flagrant immorality. Both classes are diseased, but there is this difference between them. In the one case the distemper breaks out in hideous and loathsome corruptions, while in the other it is concealed in the system, preys upon the very vitals, and so insidiously

and well nigh imperceptibly works its way, that death can hardly fail to be the inevitable consequence.

Thus the most hopeless characters are to be found where it might be supposed they would be least likely to be met with. We must not go in search of them to the haunts of vice, to the tavern, the brothel, the theatre, the gambling table, the race course. Strange, and almost incredible as it may seem, they are to be sought, not in such dens of iniquity, but in the house of prayer, and in the church of God !

Oh, how important is it then, that those who name the name of Christ, should be jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy ! In their case there is need for great searchings of heart, combined with the most fervent prayer, lest peradventure their profession should prove a lie, and their attachment to the Redeemer turn out to be insincere.

“ Some style him the pearl of great price,
And say he’s the fountain of joys ;
Yet feed upon folly and vice,
And cleave to the world and its toys.
Like Judas the Saviour they kiss,
And while they salute him, betray :
Ah, what will profession like this,
Avail in the terrible day ! ”

SPIRITUAL DEFILEMENT.

AND WHEN HE HAD CALLED ALL THE PEOPLE UNTO HIM, HE SAID UNTO THEM, HEARKEN UNTO ME EVERY ONE OF YOU, AND UNDERSTAND. THERE IS NOTHING FROM WITHOUT A MAN, THAT ENTERING INTO HIM CAN DEFILE HIM; BUT THE THINGS WHICH COME OUT OF HIM, THOSE ARE THEY THAT DEFILE THE MAN. IF ANY MAN HAVE EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR. AND WHEN HE WAS ENTERED INTO THE HOUSE FROM THE PEOPLE, HIS DISCIPLES ASKED HIM CONCERNING THE PARABLE. AND HE SAITH UNTO THEM, &c."—Mark vii. 14-23.

I. THE CEREMONIALISM OF THE PHARISEES DENOUNCED.

1. The undue importance they attached to outward observances. To eat with unwashed hands was in their estimation a most serious and aggravated offence. One of the Rabbis declared "that the sin of whoredom was not so great as this, and that it was a crime to be avoided more than death."

2. The additions they made to the requirements of the law of Moses. While some of the traditions of the elders were explanatory of the divine enactments, or pretended to be so, the bulk of them were of a supplementary character; and by the respect they received, the word of God was made of none effect, and became little more than a dead letter.

3. The Saviour's discourse on this occasion was evidently intended to prepare the minds of the people for the total abolition of all ceremonial rites. The distinction between clean and unclean meats was a prominent feature of the Mosaic economy; but our Lord here states, "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man."

II. THE IGNORANCE OF THE DISCIPLES REPROVED.—

“And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable. And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also?”

1. To us their dulness of apprehension appears strange and unaccountable. On many occasions they manifested the grossest ignorance, notwithstanding the great advantages they enjoyed.

2. In their ignorance we see the effect, not merely of inattention, but of prejudice and bigotry. How difficult was it to induce Peter to go to the house of Cornelius, and to eat with him! But at length he was brought to see that what God had cleansed, should not be regarded as common or unclean.

III. THE DEPRAVITY OF HUMAN NATURE EXHIBITED.—
We are shown—

1. The source of evil. It is in the heart; the fountain is corrupt, and nothing pure can proceed from it.

2. The diversified streams of evil. “Adulteries, fornications, thefts, murders, covetousness,” &c. What a fearful catalogue!

3. The contaminating influence of evil. These are the things by which men are defiled; and no outward washings, no abstinence from meats and drinks, no observance of any carnal ordinances, can purge them away, or be accepted as a compensation for indulging therein.

THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN.

BUT KNOW THIS, THAT IF THE GOOD MAN OF THE HOUSE HAD KNOWN IN WHAT WATCH THE THIEF WOULD COME, HE WOULD HAVE WATCHED, AND WOULD NOT HAVE SUFFERED HIS HOUSE TO BE BROKEN UP. THEREFORE BE YE ALSO READY; FOR IN SUCH AN HOUR AS YE THINK NOT THE SON OF MAN COMETH.—Matt. xxiv. 43-44.

IN these words a familiar and striking similitude is employed. The same figure is frequently used on other occasions, especially in the writings of the apostles, and it was doubtless borrowed by them from the passage before us. It would seem that robbers greatly abounded in Palestine at the time of our Lord; and his hearers therefore would be likely at once to feel the force of this statement, in which he speaks of the unexpected approach of a thief in the darkness of night, and who, with noiseless steps, broke in upon the slumbers of an unsuspecting family.

But it is to the practical inference contained in the concluding verse, that our attention will now be mainly directed. “Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” Two leading particulars are here set forth, namely, the solemn event referred to, and the important duty enforced.

I. THE SOLEMN EVENT TO WHICH THIS EXHORTATION REFERS.—It is the coming of the Son of man. This phrase is used in various senses, or rather there are several comings to which it is applied. He appeared to the ancient patriarchs as the angel or messenger of the covenant. He appeared in the types and shadows of the old dispensation. He appeared in our nature as God manifest in the flesh in the fulness of time. He appeared as the instrument of divine vengeance in the

destruction of Jerusalem. He appeared, and still continues to appear, by his Spirit, in the ministry of the gospel, and the appointed ordinances of his church. But at present we shall confine ourselves to two comings, both of which are yet future, and which most closely concern us all.

1. The coming of our Lord on the day of judgment. On no subject are the inspired records more full and more decisive, than they are on this. And from the frequency with which it is set forth, especially in the New Testament, nothing can be more evident than that we should live under a realizing impression and habitual expectation of that most momentous and most glorious event. At present we shall only quote two passages out of many. In the first chapter of Acts we read, "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Here we have angels, specially commissioned from the celestial court, conveying the tidings that the Saviour will again appear; and it is doubtless to his second coming at the last day that they refer. Addressing the Thessalonians, the apostle gives the following representation, in which is shown not only the certainty of the event, but the consequences that will flow from it, to the sinner on the one hand, and to the saint on the other. "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who

shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power : when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe."

The predictions of scripture on this subject are abundantly confirmed by the whole economy of grace, and also by the arrangements and dispensations of divine providence. All that Jesus did and suffered at his first advent proclaim that he will again appear. The various attributes of God's nature, his holiness, justice, truth, mercy, all prove that the Saviour will again appear. The manifold distresses, and disorders, and irregularities of the present state, declare that he will again appear. All the graces of the saint now imperfect and incomplete, and all the guilt of the sinner now unvisited and unavenged, testify that he will again appear. The sleeping dust of countless myriads in our various cemeteries and graveyards, waiting to be re-united to the deathless spirit which for a season has taken its flight, indicates that he will again appear. The cries of the souls under the altar, "How long, Lord, holy and true?" afford most conclusive evidence that he will again appear. In a word, heaven, and earth, and hell, God and men, angels and devils, all announce that he will assuredly appear. Their testimonies, however discordant in other respects, are one in confirming the intimation of our text, that "the Son of man cometh."

2. But there is another and nearer coming than that of the last judgment, and to which it is probable these words have more immediate reference, namely, the coming of the Son of man at death. And it is a sure and solemn truth, that his coming at death will be identical, as far as the eternal character of the soul is concerned, with his coming on the great day. As the tree falleth, so it shall be ; and as death leaves us, so the judgment will find us. When we are summoned from this mortal state, there will be no change in our spiritual condition

afterwards. The character with which we shall sink into the grave is that with which we shall reappear on the morning of the resurrection. The character which habit has fixed and strengthened through life, will adhere to us through the whole of that mysterious interval which separates the day of our dissolution from the day of our final account. No sooner is the last breath drawn than the sentence is uttered, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still."

In this world many have been reduced before now to a most woful condition; it has, however, only continued for a limited season. There was Job; he became the subject of no ordinary affliction and distress; but the Lord turned again his captivity, and restored him to more than his former happiness and prosperity. David, again, who had to flee before Saul from cave to cave, being hunted by him as a partridge upon the mountains; but a change came, and he afterwards sat upon the throne of Israel. So with Joseph, who was hated by his brethren, and sold to the Ishmaelites, and conveyed to a strange land, and condemned as an evil doer, and lodged in a dungeon; but in process of time the wheel turned in his favour, and he was made governor of the whole land of Egypt. But the condition we shall be in when the Son of man will come to call us hence, will remain unchanged for ever. If unsaved, unpardoned, unrenewed then, we shall continue so to all eternity.

To the true believer nothing can be more cheering than to regard death as the coming of Christ. That we are warranted to view it in this light is evident, not only from the words before us, but from many other passages. To his sorrowing disciples our Lord said, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." It is evident that the immediate

reference of this blessed promise was to their removal from this lower world. For when were they to be taken to dwell with the Saviour? Immediately on their dismissal from the body; so at least Paul expected when he said that he had "a desire to depart and be with Christ, which was far better." So that if the blessedness announced is enjoyed previous to the day of judgment, the special coming that is spoken of must be previous to it also. We ask then, What is death to the child of God? It is the coming of the Son of man. It is not the king of terrors, but his dearest friend, who has come to take him to reside with himself in the Father's house on high. Now this truth is full of consolation; and were it properly realized, much of the Christian's anxiety and distress, when looking forward to the closing scene, would be removed; it could hardly fail to deliver those who, through fear of death, have been all their lifetime subject to bondage. Thou timid and trembling one, endeavour to realize it. Say to thyself, death is the coming of my Saviour; and shall I dread meeting him whom my soul loveth, who is all my salvation and all my desire? O no; when he announces "Surely I come quickly," let my instant and cordial response be, "Amen; Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

We read that on one occasion the disciples were overtaken by a terrific storm. Their situation, as described by the evangelists, was a truly appalling one. It was in the dead of night, and they were alone, for their great Master had gone to a neighbouring mountain to spend the night in prayer. In the midst of their distress, when their frail bark was tossed to and fro by the raging billows, which threatened every moment to bury them in a watery grave, they perceived at some short distance a certain object which added greatly to their previous alarm. What it was they knew not, but they soon concluded that it must be an apparition. The account states that "being greatly troubled, they said

it was a spirit, and they cried out for fear." But in a short time they heard a voice, and what it said was, "It is I; be not afraid." It was a voice they at once recognised; its gentle inflections, its soft and tender tones, convinced them that it was the voice of their Beloved. It was enough; all their fears vanished, and the storm, the storm without and the storm within, was instantly stilled. We have referred to this occurrence as emblematic of the departure of the righteous. Many storms he has to pass through during his life, but what are they when compared with the storm of death! He can then truly say, in the words of the Psalmist, "The floods compass me about; all thy waves and thy billows, go over me." But as those waves dash and those angry billows roar, to the eye of faith a superhuman form appears, while the gracious utterance is again heard, "It is I; be not afraid." And the departing believer is enabled with unshrinking confidence to say, "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

But while the text speaks of the coming of the Son of man, it also refers to the time of his arrival. That he will come is of all sure things the most sure, but *when* he will come is of all uncertain things the most uncertain. We know neither the day, nor the hour, nor the moment. The great matter is to be prepared, and then all will be well whenever the summons is given. This leads us to notice—

II. THE IMPORTANT DUTY ENJOINED.—We shall consider it in a three-fold aspect, the first of which may be called—

1. A readiness of state. By nature we are in a state of guilt and condemnation. "We know," the apostle states, "that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Now in this you, my fellow sinner, are included; you are verily guilty before God, and being guilty

before him, you are exposed to his righteous and everlasting indignation. Listen further to the words of our Lord: "He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." And again, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." O how terrible the thought of having the wrath of God abiding on us, and that continually. At home and abroad, in health and sickness, in prosperity and adversity, to have his wrath hanging like a dark cloud over our devoted heads!

But some one may anxiously inquire, Is there a possibility for me to be delivered from this awful state? Undoubtedly there is: and the way of deliverance is clearly pointed out. It is by faith in Him who is the end of the law for righteousness, and who endured its penalty when he hung as our substitute on the accursed tree. "He that believeth on Him is not condemned:" they are the condemned ones who believe not; and that is the reason why they are condemned: "*because* he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God." By faith in Christ is meant a believing application to him; it is a cordial reception of him as he is freely offered in the gospel: it is a simple and exclusive reliance of the soul upon his infinite merits as the only ground of our acceptance with God. This is saving faith; and to those who possess it there is no condemnation. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. A readiness of character. To have the condemnation removed from our guilty persons, and be acquitted from the charges which God's violated law brings against us, is a great matter; but still something more is necessary. Before we can be the subjects of that readiness of which the Saviour speaks, we must undergo an inward

change ; we must be renewed in the spirit of our minds ; we must have new desires and dispositions, and be made altogether new creatures, old things having passed away, and all things become new.

There are many who contend that the change spoken of in the scriptures, and which is there represented as being absolutely essential to entering the kingdom of heaven, is simply a change in the outward conduct ; and consequently that those whose moral character is upright and honourable do not need that mighty transformation. Dr. Paley observes, " If we insist upon conversion as indispensable to all for the purpose of being saved, we shall mislead some who were never, that they knew, either indifferent to religion, or alienated from it." And he adds, " Such persons need not be made miserable by the want of a consciousness of such a change." How absolutely astounding is it to hear such a man speak in such a manner ! Never was there a sentiment more completely at variance with the disclosures of the oracles of God. If the Bible insists upon anything, it is upon conversion as indispensable to all ; to those whose moral character is unstained, as well as to the most abandoned profligate that ever breathed. The sacred writers do not confound natural loveliness with the grace of God, but draw a distinct line of demarcation between them. They show that there may be much of the former without the least grain of the latter. There may be an abhorrence of all that is mean and disreputable ; there may be integrity that is proof against whatever is fraudulent ; there may be the heart that pours forth its warm and tender sympathies over human suffering ; there may be the arm that is nerved to shield the oppressed, and the hand that is extended to relieve the destitute ; there may be all this, and much more than this, while there is a total absence of true piety. The word of God, we repeat, does most distinctly insist upon conversion, upon a radical change of heart, as indispensable to all ; and for

this reason, that it knows nothing of those characters, who were never indifferent to religion or alienated from it. The inspired apostles never met with them, however Dr. Paley might have done; and so the charge they bring forward of a sinful nature and depraved heart is a universal charge. "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

3. A readiness of frame is required as well as a readiness of state and character. What that is the child of God well knows; but he knows it, alas, too frequently by a mournful consciousness of the want of it. Often does he find himself in a frame of mind that is far from being a suitable one for meeting the Son of man. Instead of feeling as good old Simeon felt when he said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation;" he has to pray as David prayed, "O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more."

May we be led, and led without delay, to seek to be ready. Ready by being united to the Lord Jesus through a living faith, for there is no condemnation to those that are in him; ready by an inward experience of the regenerating and sanctifying influences of that divine Spirit, who worketh effectually in all them that believe; and ready by keeping our hearts with all diligence, setting our affections more and more on things above, having our loins constantly girded about, and our lamps ever burning. Happy is he who can say with the apostle, "I am now ready;" no words can express our blessedness if we, on good grounds, are able to say so.

THE KINGDOM DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF.

BUT WHEN THE PHARISEES HEARD IT THEY SAID, THIS FELLOW DOETH NOT CAST OUT DEVILS, BUT BY BEELZEBUB THE PRINCE OF THE DEVILS. AND JESUS KNEW THEIR THOUGHTS, AND SAID UNTO THEM, EVERY KINGDOM DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF IS BROUGHT TO DESOLATION ; AND EVERY CITY OR HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF SHALL NOT STAND : AND IF I BY BEELZEBUB CAST OUT DEVILS, &c.—Mat. xii. 24-30.

THESE words contain—

I. A BLASPHEMOUS ACCUSATION.—In reference thereto we shall notice—

1. The circumstances that led to it. A truly miserable creature was brought to Jesus—one that was blind and dumb, and also possessed with a devil. Our Lord put forth his miraculous power, and delivered this wretched object from his sad condition. Such a wonderful cure greatly astonished the multitude, as well it might, and they naturally inquired, “Is not this the Son of David?” They were thus disposed to acknowledge him as the promised Messiah, and it is probable that what had now taken place reminded them of the ancient prediction, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.” But with very different feelings was the act regarded by the proud and envious Pharisees ; and hence the awful charge which they brought against the Saviour, in order, if possible, to counteract the above impression, and prevent the people from believing in him.

2. The acknowledgment it involved. It was that a real miracle had been wrought ; and such a confession, from enemies so keen, unscrupulous, and determined, is of considerable importance. They would have denied the reality of the cure, if any semblance of imposition

appeared; but it was so evident, so public, so extraordinary, that they were compelled to acknowledge its genuineness. On other occasions it was so likewise. "Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation."

3. The spirit of daring impiety they manifested. It was necessary for them to account for this wonderful deed in some way; but how they were to do so was by no means an easy matter. They could not contend that it was merely *human*, for it was evident to all that it evinced supernatural power. They dared not acknowledge that it was *divine*; else the question would be at once put to them, "Why then do ye not believe on him?" So they were driven to the desperate alternative of saying that it was *satanic*. "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of devils." What awful blasphemy! What rancorous malignity!

II. A TRIUMPHANT VINDICATION.—Their theory, so vile and monstrous, is opposed on the ground—

1. Of its gross absurdity. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" As the direct object of the Saviour's miracles was to dethrone the Evil One, and undermine his kingdom, how unreasonable was it to suppose that Satan would work against himself, and become the coadjutor of Him who was manifested for the express purpose of destroying the works of the devil!

2. Its palpable inconsistency. "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges." Their own disciples pretended to exercise this power; and were

they prepared to admit that such, whom they patronised and encouraged, were acting under Satanic influence? This was the dilemma in which they were fixed, and from which they were unable to extricate themselves.

3. Its absolute impossibility. "Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house." Here Satan is represented as bound, and consequently altogether helpless; and for him to aid either in his own ejection, or that of other evil spirits, was utterly preposterous.

III. AN IMPORTANT DECLARATION.—"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad."

1. What is here implied. That there are but two parties, those who are for Christ and those who are against him. The Pharisees had taken a decided stand on one side, and there were some who had come out as prominently on the other; but many were present on this occasion who kept back without identifying themselves with either.

2. What is here expressed. That there is no such thing as neutrality; and therefore the ground occupied by the class to whom we have just referred was altogether untenable. It is true that our Lord stated on another occasion, "He that is not against us is for us;" but those words were spoken under very different circumstances. Were a foreign prince to invade this country he might say, "He that is not against me is with me;" on the other hand our Queen could state, "He that is not with me is against me." Each announcement is correct and applicable, as it is spoken from an offensive or a defensive position.

3. What may be thence inferred. If it be perilous to halt and hesitate, what must be the doom of those who are openly hostile to Christ and his kingdom!

THE LOST SHEEP.

THEN DREW NEAR UNTO HIM ALL THE PUBLICANS AND SINNERS FOR TO HEAR HIM. AND THE PHARISEES AND SCRIBES MURMURED, SAYING, THIS MAN RECEIVETH SINNERS, AND EATETH WITH THEM. AND HE SPAKE THIS PARABLE UNTO THEM, SAYING, WHAT MAN OF YOU, HAVING AN HUNDRED SHEEP, IF HE LOST ONE OF THEM, DOTHT NOT LEAVE THE NINETY AND NINE IN THE WILDERNESS, AND GO AFTER THAT WHICH IS LOST, UNTIL HE FIND IT? AND WHEN HE HATH FOUND IT, HE LAYETH IT ON HIS SHOULDERS, REJOICING. AND WHEN HE COMETH HOME, HE CALLETH TOGETHER HIS FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS, &c.—
Luke xv. 1-7.

IN these words we have the first of three parables which were delivered at the same time, and for the same object. The occasion on which they were spoken is here stated; and it will be necessary, in order to a right understanding of what follows, that our exposition should embrace the two introductory verses, which contain much that is worthy of our serious attention. They set before us—

I. AN INTERESTING GATHERING.—“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.” In this verse there are three particulars to be noticed.

1. The characters of whom this company was composed were peculiar. They are called “publicans and sinners;” and inasmuch as both of these terms have a special meaning, we shall offer a few remarks concerning each. As to the former, it is evident that the word is used in a very different sense from that which is given to it in this country. We call those “publicans,” who keep houses for the sale of intoxicating drinks; but the publicans we read of so frequently in the New Testament, as all intelligent persons are aware, were collectors

of the taxes. They were so named from the word *publicum*, or state revenue ; and among the Romans the title *publicanus* was given to persons of rank, whose office was similar to that of our commissioners of the taxes, as well as to those who, in subordinate capacities, acted under them. It is the latter, who were chiefly Jews, that are referred to in the gospel narratives. These publicans were a class of men who were regarded with feelings of no ordinary detestation. To account for this several reasons may be assigned. One is, that they were much given to extortion ; and there was a peculiarity about their office which gave them special facilities for indulging in such a practice. With us the amount is fixed by the public authorities, and the tax-gatherer receives from them a regular salary. But then, it seems, a sum of money was paid to the government for the privilege of collecting the rates of a certain district ; so that these officers, after first indemnifying themselves, appropriate the overplus as their profit. They would naturally be anxious to gain as much as possible ; and as the whole affair was in their own hands, and the people left in a great measure to their mercy, it is easy to perceive that they were under great temptations to overcharge and oppress.

But the publicans, even if they had only claimed what was legally due, would have been regarded with feelings of strong dislike by their countrymen. The Jews being at present under the Roman yoke, the tribute exacted from them was a public and humiliating indication of their national dishonour. Now for any, from among themselves, to become the willing instruments of this disgrace, by holding such an office under their powerful oppressors, they regarded as an offence of no ordinary magnitude. All intercourse with them was therefore shunned ; they were not allowed to enter the synagogues ; their offerings were not accepted at the temple ; their evidence was not received in courts of justice ; in short, they were

put on the same level with heathens, and, as renegades and traitors, were probably more abhorred even than the heathens themselves.

Being thus openly stigmatised, and feeling that they had no reputation to sustain, the publicans, as a natural result, abandoned themselves to all that was evil. They cared for no one, as no one cared for them. So they became a set of thoroughly base and abandoned characters; the finger of scorn which was pointed at them, they met with reckless defiance; and however unjustly they had been treated at first, they now deserved in a great measure the social exclusion to which public opinion had doomed them.

But with the publicans the evangelist connects another class, who are called sinners. This term is also used in a special acceptation; in other words, the individuals to whom it is applied were sinners in a different sense from that in which the whole human family are sinners. In an earlier chapter of this gospel we read, "And, behold, there was a woman in that city, which was a sinner." Now any one might naturally say, I should like to know if there were any women there that were not sinners, or men either; for have not "all sinned, and come short of the glory of God?" The solemn truth set forth in the passage now quoted is, of course, too evident to be denied. It is clear therefore that the word "sinner" in the above case has a peculiar meaning; and what that meaning is, is sufficiently obvious. She was an open, a notorious sinner, one of those unfortunate ones who live upon the wages of iniquity. It was in this sense that the term was used by the self-righteous Jews in the time of our Lord; not that they confined it to prostitutes, but all outwardly immoral characters were thus designated. The inspired writers, indeed, do not employ the word in precisely the same sense as that in which we are accustomed to use it. With us an ungodly man is a stronger expression than a sinful man, and denotes a

higher degree of wickedness. But in the scriptures it is otherwise. There the ungodly are simply those who live without God in the world, though they may be free from all that is grossly vicious: while by sinners the more public and daring transgressors of the divine law are intended.

Having thus described the characters who were now gathered together, the next particular to be noticed is—

2. That their number was considerable. It is said that there “drew near to him *all* the publicans and sinners.” This signifies, most probably, the whole of those who dwelt in that part of the country, or a large proportion of them, for the word *all* is often employed to represent many, without involving the idea of absolute universality. In another passage it is said, “And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, *many* publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples.” But while there was then a large gathering, it is evident that it was much larger on the occasion before us. They must have flocked in crowds from all the regions round about. Leaving their ordinary avocations, they were drawn, as if by a common impulse, to Him who was now an object of considerable notoriety, and whose fame, especially among the lower orders, was becoming more widely extended from day to day.

3. Their object in coming together was most important. Many went after Christ, to oppose, to tempt, to ensnare him: others went from mere curiosity, to see him perform signs and wonders; others, from a still lower motive, such as those to whom he said, “Ye seek me, not because of the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled.” But the multitudes who now drew near came “for to hear him.” That such characters should come, come in such numbers, and for such a purpose, shows that there must have been something peculiarly attractive in the Saviour’s ministry.

There was indeed everything about him,—his unassuming demeanour, his gentleness, his familiarity, together with the simplicity of his style, and the homely nature of his illustrations, to interest the masses, and lead the common people to hear him gladly. But there is reason to believe that not a few of this class had been previously awakened to a consciousness of their guilt and danger, more especially through the ministry of John the Baptist; and this would be the chief cause why they flocked after the Saviour, to listen to the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. These publicans and sinners would thus feel their need of the blessings he proclaimed and bestowed, and must have longed with a deep and earnest longing to be made partakers thereof. So they were found doing on this, as well as on several other occasions, what the voice from heaven declared, the voice which was heard by the disciples on the holy mount, “This is my beloved Son; hear him.” And many of them heard, not with the hearing of the ear only, but they received the truth in the love of it; and thus in their case the important assurance was verified: “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” But we have next to notice—

II. AN UNSEEMLY COMPLAINT.—In itself no scene could be more pleasing than that which is here exhibited. To see these wretched outcasts around the Saviour, listening with such eager and anxious attention to the message of mercy, drinking in his words even as the parched soil drinks in the refreshing showers. It was surely a sight that should have produced no ordinary satisfaction and joy in the breast of every beholder. But with very different feelings was it regarded by some who were present on this occasion. “And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

What a spirit did these individuals manifest ! Yea, what an abominable accusation do they virtually bring against the Saviour ! From his associating with such characters, they more than insinuate that he was no better than they. There is, of course, much truth in the saying, "Tell me with whom thou consortest, and I will tell thee what thou art," or as it is more familiarly expressed, "a man is known by the company he keeps." But never was this principle so grossly, so outrageously, so blasphemously misapplied as in the present instance. To mingle with sinners because their company is attractive and congenial, is one thing ; while to hold intercourse with them for the purpose of striving to do them good, is surely another thing. Where should the physician be but amongst the diseased ? And where should the Saviour be but amongst the lost ? Did he not come for the express purpose of seeking and saving them ? Thus what these unscrupulous adversaries of our Lord uttered as a vile and malignant reproach, was in reality the highest compliment they could pay him. Instead of its being a foul blot upon his character, it is a glorious diadem upon his brow. The ground of their accusation is at once the evidence of his divine mission, and a proof of his fidelity in the accomplishment of the beneficent and all-important embassy which brought him from the skies. But we observe concerning the declaration before us that it is—

I. Most certainly true. Many important statements, the correctness and propriety of which cannot be doubted, have been made by persons who deserved no credit, and had no claims whatever upon our regard. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life." These words express a clear and self-evident truth. Life is more precious than aught besides, honour and Christian principle excepted ; and hence the highest penalty which it is in the power of men to inflict is to take it away. However great the possessions of an

individual may be, he would be ready to part with all in order to save his life. But by whom was this declaration uttered? It was by the great deceiver, even he who has been a liar from the beginning. Thus the father of lies knows how to speak the truth when it serves his own purpose. "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." Here we have words of truth again, words strikingly accurate and appropriate. Paul and his companion were pre-eminently the servants of God; and as to the work in which they were engaged, for the accomplishment of which they travelled from region to region, encountering all sorts of difficulties and dangers, it could not possibly, even by the pen of inspiration, be more correctly described. But who was it that said this? It was the language of a poor unfortunate damsel, who was possessed with a spirit of divination, and who for gain practised the vile arts of enchantment and soothsaying. So with the statement before us: "This man receiveth sinners." Those who uttered the words were the most inveterate enemies of the Lord Jesus, men who were envious of his popularity, who sought to damage his reputation in every way, and whose enmity against him was not satisfied until they had secured his death. But although the words proceeded from their lips, lips under which the poison of asps was concealed, and which were full of deceit and bitterness; yet words more true and more important were never spoken, either by the tongues of men or the tongues of angels. But in addition to its truth and importance, this statement is—

2. Highly encouraging. The gospel is good tidings of great joy, but it has nothing more cheering to announce than that "this man receiveth sinners." Sinners of all grades and conditions, the meanest, the vilest, the guiltiest. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance; and in one sense the greatest sinners receive from him the warmest welcome. As it

has been well observed, "The worse your case is, the higher your assurance of immediate salvation. Yours is the hope of the maimed and bleeding soldier, whom kind comrades bear from the deadly trench, and who knows that the worse his wound, the more confidently he can reckon on the surgeon's earliest care." For those who regard themselves with complacency, who trust in their own righteousness, and imagine there is something meritorious in their past conduct, or commendable in their present dispositions and desires, the Saviour has no favours to bestow. The lost he came to seek, the ruined he came to rescue; and to those who feel that they are such, wretched, condemned, hell-deserving, there is here strong consolation. He receiveth sinners; sinners whose iniquities are in enormity red as crimson, and in number as the sands upon the sea shore. The most polluted, the most ignorant, the most unworthy, he is ready to embrace in the outstretched arms of his unbounded mercy. Though spurned and frowned upon by their fellow-mortals, to the provisions of his grace, and the enjoyment of his friendship, they are most freely, most cordially welcome.

3. The obligations which this encouraging truth involves is very clear and decided. Does Jesus receive sinners? Then we should apply to him, and that without the least delay. No lengthened process of preparation is necessary. The only recommendation he requires is that we are sinful, helpless, undone; and all the fitness that is necessary is for us to feel our need of him. Without this it is certain that we shall never think of going to him, for "they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick."

We are told by Mark, in the fourth chapter of his gospel, that "when the disciples had sent away the multitude, they took him as he was in the ship." The words allude to our blessed Lord; but what is meant by the statement "as he was," can only be inferred. It

being in the evening, after a day of ceaseless toil, as all his days were, it is probable that bodily fatigue is intended. As it was on another occasion, when a somewhat similar expression is used : " Jesus therefore being wearied with his journey, sat *thus* on the well." That it was no unusual thing for him to be completely exhausted when, as now, " even was come," cannot be doubted. Indeed, it could scarcely be otherwise. His long journeys on foot under a scorching sun : his incessant labours, and that after whole nights spent in agonising supplication ; the load of sorrow which pressed so heavily upon his righteous soul ; all this must have caused him often to feel faint and weary, especially as we have reason to suppose that his physical frame was far more delicate than robust and vigorous. When it is said therefore that the disciples took him " as he was," we are inclined to believe that such was his condition on that occasion. They received him, weak, almost worn out, hardly able to move a single step ; and in that state of languor and exhaustion, they conveyed him, it may be carried him, into the ship.

Now what is here said of the disciples in relation to their great Lord and Master, can be said of Him in reference to many a poor sinner. He has received him " even as he was ;" not merely weary and heavy laden, but covered with pollution, an object utterly loathsome, full of wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. Yea, it is thus he has received each and all who have been made partakers of his salvation. He has taken them just as they were, though he has not left them to remain as they were ; for it could be subsequently said to them, " Ye are washed, ye are justified, ye are sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Let us then go to him just as we are ; let nothing keep us away, and nothing cause us to linger. Be this our wise, our firm, our instant resolve :

“ Just as I am, without one plea,
 But that thy blood was shed for me,
 And that thou bid'st me come to thee—
 O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
 To rid my soul of one dark blot,
 To thee whose blood can cleanse each spot,
 O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about
 With many a conflict, many a doubt,
 Fightings within and fears without—
 O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am—thy love unknown,
 Has broken every barrier down ;
 Now to be thine, yea, thine alone—
 O Lamb of God, I come.”

III. A TRIUMPHANT VINDICATION.—Far from denying the charge which the envious Pharisees and scribes brought against him, he at once acknowledges that it was even so ; and to convince them, if they were open to conviction, that his conduct in receiving sinners was perfectly justifiable, he brings forward the following case :—“ What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it ? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me ; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

On a former occasion, when a similar accusation was brought against him, he compared himself to a physician, and showed that he mixed with publicans and sinners, not because he was insensible of their wickedness, or took any pleasure in their evil ways : but that he associated with them as patients rather than as companions. Here he compares himself to a shepherd ; and if those who sustain such an office are expected, when any of

their flock have wandered, to use every means to bring them back to the fold, he surely was not to be censured for the attention he paid to, and the efforts he put forth for the restoration of, these lost sheep of the house of Israel.

In the words before us there are two things at which we shall briefly glance. The first is—

1. The principle which is here embodied. Between one sheep and ninety-nine, the difference is very great; and yet the single wanderer engrosses the undivided attention and solicitude of the shepherd, although its value is only the one hundredth part of those which seem to be altogether uncared for. But however strange this may appear, the case presents no real difficulty. The one sheep was lost, while all the rest were safe; and it is a principle of human nature that anything which is in danger should excite greater concern, and its recovery afford higher pleasure, than the undisturbed possession of what is known to be secure. We have a striking proof of this in what frequently occurs in domestic life. "When one of a numerous household," says the eloquent Chalmers, "droops under the power of disease, is not that the one to whom all the tenderness is turned, and who, in a manner, monopolises the inquiries of his neighbourhood, and the care of his family? When the sighing of the midnight storm sends a dismal foreboding into the mother's heart, to whom of all her offspring, I would ask, are her thoughts and her anxieties then wandering? Is it not to her sailor boy whom her fancy has placed amid the rude and angry surges of the ocean? Does not this, the hour of his apprehended danger, concentrate upon him the whole force of her wakeful meditations? And does not he engross, for a season, her every sensibility, and her every prayer? We sometimes hear of shipwrecked passengers thrown upon a barbarous shore; and seized upon by its prowling inhabitants; and hurried away through the tracks of a dreary and

unknown wilderness; and sold into captivity; and loaded with the fetters of irrecoverable bondage; and who, stripped of every other liberty but the liberty of thought, feel even this to be another ingredient of wretchedness, for what can they think of but home? and as all its kind and tender imagery comes upon their remembrance, how can they think of it but in the bitterness of despair? Oh tell me, when the fame of all this disaster reaches his family, who is the member of it to whom is directed the full tide of its griefs and of its sympathies? Who is it that, for weeks and for months, usurps their every feeling, and calls out their largest sacrifices, and sets them to the busiest expedients for getting him back again? Who is it that makes them forgetful of themselves and of all around them; and tell me if you can assign a limit to the pains, and the exertions, and the surrenders which afflicted parents and weeping sisters would make to seek and to save him?"

Now the nature and conclusiveness of the Saviour's vindication is abundantly evident. Those with whom he was contending trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and never doubted for a moment the safety of their spiritual state; while the class they despised, according to their own showing, were ignorant and out of the way, sunk in vice, and in danger of perishing for ever. It is true that the Pharisees were deceiving themselves, but that does not affect the Saviour's argument. He is reasoning with them on their own principles, and out of their own lips, or by their own confession, condemns them. As if he had said, Be it so that you are righteous, yet why should you murmur at the return of these poor sinners? They are wretched wanderers from the fold of the great Shepherd, that fold in which you are safely lodged, as you suppose; and the recovery of a single strayed one ought surely to be regarded by you with feelings, not of dissatisfaction, but of no ordinary delight.

2. The important truth which is here announced. "I

say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." There is joy in heaven when those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious are holding on in their Christian course, adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour, and abounding in every good word and work. The Most High himself takes pleasure in his people, he rejoices over them with joy, and views them with divine complacency. But when sinners are awakened, when dead souls are quickened to newness of life, when Satan loses one of his subjects, and a miserable captive is liberated from the bondage of corruption, and brought to the glorious liberty of the children of God, then the celestial inhabitants rejoice with a peculiar and pre-eminent joy. "The tears of penitents," it has been said, "are the wine of angels, and their conversion causes *Te deums* among all the heavenly hosts."

But, after all, what is the joy of angels when compared with the joy of the Lord Jesus? If the friends and neighbours of the shepherd rejoiced when the lost sheep was found, what must have been the feelings of the shepherd himself, who, regardless of fatigue, and fearless of danger, had traversed the distant plains, and climbed up lofty mountains, in search of the hapless wanderer? Now this consideration is full of encouragement to every anxious sinner. That Jesus is able to save is a cheering truth; that he is willing to save is yet more cheering; but that he delights to save is the most cheering of all. Thus while it is true that he receiveth sinners, yet it is not the whole truth, for he receives them with unbounded joy. It is an act which gratifies all the benevolent yearnings of his loving and tender heart; an act in which he feels himself more than recompensed for the severe toils he underwent, and the bitter agonies he endured. In every rescued one he sees afresh of the travail of his soul, and in seeing it he is abundantly satisfied.

CHRISTIAN WATCHFULNESS.

FOR THE SON OF MAN IS AS A MAN TAKING A FAR JOURNEY, WHO LEFT HIS HOUSE, AND GAVE AUTHORITY TO HIS SERVANTS, AND TO EVERY MAN HIS WORK, AND COMMANDED THE PORTER TO WATCH. WATCH YE THEREFORE; FOR YE KNOW NOT WHEN THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE COMETH, &c.—Mark xiii. 34-37.

WE have here—

I. A CERTAIN EVENT REFERRED TO.—It is the departure of the Son of man. That he should go away was absolutely necessary, for various reasons.

1. It was impossible that his state of humiliation should be continued. While he remained on earth he could not wear “the visible robes of his imperial majesty;” or if he had worn them, his people would not have been able to endure the dazzling effulgence of his glory. “In contact with the earth’s surface,” as one observes, “the sun would be only a consuming fire; from the height of heaven it sheds down light and heat on every land. So Christ after the days of his humiliation were over, was a light inaccessible and full of glory. Under a momentary glimpse of that light, the disciple who had familiarly lain in his bosom in the days of his flesh, fell at his feet as dead. Well might we entreat that the light should not be so shown to us any more.”

2. The work he had to do in heaven required his presence there. Upon the high priest of old many duties devolved, but some of them could not be fulfilled without his going into the holiest of all. So the Lord Jesus had to enter, not into the holy place made with hands, which was a figure of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

3. His removal was necessary in order that the Holy

Spirit might be bestowed. This is the special cause he assigned in his valedictory address to his disciples. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth ; It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

II. A RESPONSIBLE TRUST COMMITTED.

1. What he left in charge of his servants was his house. The church is frequently set forth under this designation. "That thou mayest know," says Paul when addressing Timothy, "how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." Again, in the epistle to the Hebrews he states, "And Moses verily was faithful in all his house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after : but Christ as a Son over his own house, whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."

2. Those whom he left behind were invested with the powers necessary for the transaction of affairs during his absence. To his apostles special authority was granted, his language to them being, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

3. While peculiar authority was granted to some, none of the servants were permitted to remain idle. Each one had his work to do, and he was expected, according to the best of his ability, to promote the interests of his lord.

III. AN IMPORTANT DUTY ENJOINED.

1. To no subject is our attention more frequently directed than that of watchfulness. In providence, those things which are most necessary to our well-being are bestowed in greatest abundance ; so in the scriptures what is of chief moment to our safety and happiness is most largely insisted upon.

2. The consideration by which it is enforced. It is the uncertainty as to when the master of the house might return; whether at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning.

3. Whatever limits may belong to other obligations, this is universal in its claims. "And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO A MAN THAT IS AN HOUSEHOLDER, WHICH WENT OUT EARLY IN THE MORNING TO HIRE LABOURERS INTO HIS VINEYARD. AND WHEN HE HAD AGREED WITH THE LABOURERS FOR A PENNY A DAY, HE SENT THEM INTO HIS VINEYARD. AND HE WENT OUT ABOUT THE THIRD HOUR, AND SAW OTHERS STANDING IDLE, IN THE MARKET PLACE, AND SAID UNTO THEM; GO YE ALSO INTO THE VINEYARD, AND WHATSOEVER IS RIGHT I WILL GIVE YOU. AND THEY WENT THEIR WAY. AGAIN HE WENT OUT ABOUT THE SIXTH AND NINTH HOUR, AND DID LIKEWISE. AND ABOUT THE ELEVENTH HOUR HE WENT OUT, AND FOUND OTHERS STANDING IDLE, AND SAITH UNTO THEM, WHY STAND YE HERE ALL THE DAY IDLE? THEY SAY UNTO HIM, BECAUSE NO MAN HATH HIRED US. HE SAITH UNTO THEM, GO YE ALSO INTO THE VINEYARD, &c.—Matt. xx. 1-16.

A STORY is related by Jeremy Taylor about a certain bishop Ivo, who going on an embassy to St. Louis, meets by the way a grave, sad woman, with fire in one hand, and water in the other; and when he inquires what these symbols meant, she answered, “My purpose is, with the fire to burn Paradise, and with the water to quench the flames of hell, that men may serve God without the incentives of hope and fear, and purely for the love of God.”

The sentiment which is here expressed is in many respects objectionable. There is great danger, as well as awful presumption, in supposing that we are wiser than God, or thinking that our plans are preferable to those which he has adopted. In his word he frequently appeals both to our hopes and fears; rewards and punishments are there, in a great variety of forms, set before us; and it is not for us to despise any motives or inducements which he has thought necessary to employ; nor can the laudable intention of aspiring to act in his

service with pure disinterestedness, absolve us from the charge of impious arrogance, when we make light of any portion of his revealed will.

That it is proper for us, like Moses, to have respect unto the recompense of the reward, is shown at the close of the preceding chapter. A rich young man came to Jesus, who found the terms of discipleship more stringent than he had expected; and the consequence was that, being indisposed to make the sacrifice demanded of him, even parting with the whole of his property, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. Peter, seeing this, was reminded of the contrast presented by his own case, and that of his fellow disciples, who had given up every thing, and cast their lot with Christ without any reservation. "Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" Now the Saviour did not rebuke him for asking such a question; on the contrary, the propriety and reasonableness of it is admitted; and hence he gives at once a most striking and comprehensive reply, a reply which shows that they should not serve him for nought, but that great would be their reward in heaven. "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

At the same time, while Peter's question in itself was quite legitimate, it is probable that the spirit by which it was prompted contained an admixture of self-complacency, and also some degree of a mere mercenary feeling. It looks as if he put the connection he sustained with the Saviour too much upon the footing of,

so much work so much wages. To check such a tendency the present parable was delivered; and it is necessary for this to be borne in mind in order to a right understanding of it. The inquiry proposed, as we have already remarked, was quite proper; but to look too much in that direction is undesirable, and even dangerous. All the divine rewards are, not of debt, but of divine grace; and, as we shall see, that grace is exercised in the way of sovereignty, a way that is often contrary to the notions, and repulsive to the pride, of the children of men.

Having made these preliminary observations, we shall now proceed to consider the leading features of this parable. They may be viewed under three general particulars.

I. THE HIRING.—“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive.” The successive hirings at the hours specified are variously understood. The most probable interpretations which have been given are the three following. It has been supposed that there is reference to—

1. The different dispensations of religion. According to this view those who were hired early in the morning were the ancient patriarchs, who flourished from the first

ages of the world's history as far as the time of Abraham and his immediate descendants. After them came those who were called from the commencement of the Mosaic economy down to the coming of Christ. And by such as were engaged at the eleventh hour is understood the calling of the Gentiles. They were last in general estimation on the one hand, and last as to their spiritual destitution on the other, being left for many centuries to themselves, ignorant of God, and outcasts from his favour. But though they were last for so long a period, at length they became first. Their admission into the church, as is well known, was much opposed, and no small dissatisfaction was felt when they were made fellow-heirs, and placed on a perfect equality with the chosen people as to all the privileges of the kingdom of heaven.

2. Different classes in the Jewish community. The persons whom our Saviour, the great Householder and Lord of the vineyard, first called were doubtless the apostles. They had the high honour of accompanying him, and being employed by him, from the very beginning. The next class were probably the publicans and sinners, who in considerable numbers complied with the invitation addressed to them. While the more respectable, such as the Pharisees and lawyers, rejected the counsel of God against themselves, these wretched outcasts believed to the saving of their souls, and thus became members of that church which has consisted in a great measure of the poor and despised in all ages. Subsequently, however, some of those who had stood out so long, entered the vineyard; for we read that several of the priests became obedient to the faith. They left it to a very late period; the day was far spent; it was indeed "the eleventh hour;" but they were received even then, and made monuments of that grace which they had so scornfully refused.

3. Different periods in the history of individual men.

As the proper time for labourers to enter upon their work is early in the day, so the right season to give the heart to God, and engage in his service, is the morning of life. It is natural to suppose that on the occasion before us, the bulk of those who were hired was on the first going out of the husbandman, and that such as were taken on afterwards were only a few stragglers. Certain it is that the great mass of the Saviour's disciples have been called while young, and that few in comparison have been brought to a knowledge of the truth at an advanced age. Whitfield says, that though he was instrumental in the conversion of some thousands, yet that he scarcely knew of one person having experienced a saving change after he had passed fifty years of age, and very few past forty. At the same time, that some are saved at the eleventh hour is a truth that cannot be denied; but to put off the consideration of the things that belong to our peace till that period, is to run a most tremendous risk, and displays the most extreme infatuation.

The individuals referred to in the parable were collected together at the market place, and were thus in the way of being hired. This shows the great importance of a regular observance of the means of grace, for there the great Master is most likely to be met with. It is when we are watching daily at his gates, and waiting at the posts of his door, that we may expect to receive the promised blessing, even life for evermore. "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary;" and those who frequent his courts are in the place where he may be found, and where thousands have found him, to their unspeakable joy.

These labourers were standing idle when the householder went to them; and when asked why they thus spent their time, their reply was: "Because no man hath hired us." For men to have nothing to do, who are able and willing to work, is a sad calamity; such

demand our sympathy, inasmuch as want of employment in most cases leads to want of bread. On the other hand, where idleness is voluntary, whatever sufferings may follow, at least as regards the individual himself, no pity can or should be felt. The apostle says, "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." "An idle person," as one observes, "is a monster in the creation; all nature is busy around him." But while there is a natural body and a spiritual body, so there is natural idleness and spiritual idleness; and all are guilty of the latter who live to themselves, and not to Him that died for them and rose again. Hence to many around us can the appeal be addressed, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" You are invited to enter the vineyard, and by various considerations are you urged to comply with the call. Among many others take the following:

(I.) The Lord hath need of you. There are two important truths which we should never lose sight of. One is, that we have need of Christ; and the other is, that Christ has need of us. He might have made very different arrangements for carrying on his cause, for he was by no means shut up to the alternative of employing human agency or none at all. But he has been pleased to make us "workers together with himself," and so our service is required for the accomplishment of his great and gracious designs. When the two disciples were sent to make preparations for his public entry into Jerusalem, he said to them, "Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me." Should any demur be made, as would probably be the case, they were instructed what to state in reply. "And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them." In like manner with us; our time, our talents,

our wealth, our influence, our thoughts, our affections, our lips, our hands, our feet ; of each and all it can be said, "The Lord hath need of them." Let us not then withhold from him what he requires, what he demands, and what he so richly deserves.

(2.) His service is perfect freedom. "For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments ; and his commandments are not grievous." So they have ever been found by those who have yielded themselves unto him, to serve him in newness of life. By such the divine requirements are not regarded as a galling yoke, too heavy for them to bear. Instead of being a wearisome drudgery, as many suppose, to love and serve the Saviour is to them their highest delight. The votaries of sin and Satan have doubtless a certain kind of enjoyment ; but their pleasures are no more to be compared with the pure and exquisite satisfaction enjoyed by the true followers of Christ, than were the onions and garlic of Egypt to be compared with the milk and honey of Canaan.

(3.) The honour of being in the employment of such a Master. "Ye serve the Lord Christ," says the apostle ; and He is the Prince of the kings of the earth, the Head of all principality and power, and to him all might, majesty, and dominion belong." Of Simon the sorcerer it is declared, that "he gave out that he was some great one ;" but the Lord Jesus is a great one, not in pretence, but in reality ; a great one in the highest sense which the words are capable of bearing ; yea, all expressions and all designations however emphatic, are totally inadequate to set forth his matchless and inconceivable dignity. And while he is infinitely great on the one hand, his kindness and compassion are unbounded on the other. "All of us who are his servants," it has been remarked, "have had experience of his forbearance being inexhaustible. Had we treated any other master as we have treated him, long ere this we would have been stripped of his livery, and dismissed from his service."

To those therefore who have been often invited to enter the Saviour's vineyard, but who still continue without, mere loiterers and idlers, we again address the word of exhortation. "Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?" O take, take at once His yoke upon you who is, not only great and mighty, but meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for his yoke is easy, and his burden is light.

II. THE SETTLING.—"So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny." Here the first thing to be noticed is—

1. The period specified. What is recorded in these verses took place "when even was come." The time for working was over, and the time of payment had arrived. It was required by the law of Moses, a law pervaded by the kindest and most considerate spirit notwithstanding its stringency, that the labourer's wages should be paid the same day on which the work was done. Thus we read in the 24th chapter of Deuteronomy: "Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of the strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: at his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee." And again in the 19th of Leviticus it is said, "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning."

Our lives are often compared to a day. "Turn from

him," says Job, "that he may rest, till he shall accomplish as an hireling his day." It is a truth that should be seriously pondered, and if we lay it to heart in a becoming manner, it is likely to produce the most beneficial results.

(1.) It should quicken us. Very different is the term of our mortal existence from that of the early patriarchs; theirs was indeed a long day, and being so protracted, they might have some excuse for taking their ease, having time enough and to spare. The very idea of such longevity as that which was allotted to them, appears to us quite astounding. To think of a person who had come to England with William the Conqueror, being still alive; and not only so, but likely yet to live two hundred years longer! Whatever arguments might have been employed by way of stirring them up to spiritual diligence, the shortness of time would certainly in their case have been inappropriate. Our day, on the contrary, is not more distinguished by any particular than its brevity. A great work have we to do, and for the doing of it the period assigned us is exceedingly limited. With many by far the greater portion of their short lives has already passed away, so that at the longest very little now remains. Not a moment then should be wasted of what is so transient on the one hand, and so precious on the other. We are to remember also that lost time, unlike many other losses, can never be restored. Wealth may be lost, but by a course of persevering industry it may be regained; health may be lost, yet the faded cheek may bloom again, and the shattered nerves be restrung afresh; character may be lost, but by patient continuance in well-doing, old wounds may be healed, and those whose reputation had been tarnished may obtain a good report of all men, and of the truth itself. But lost time is irrecoverable, as much so as if it were swallowed up in the recesses of a past eternity. Let us then redeem the time, because our days are few and evil.

With the great Master let our language be, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." Since death is fast approaching, let us listen to, and act upon, the seasonable advice, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

(2.) It should console us. If we have to encounter hardships and difficulties, it is a cheering thought that they will not continue long. In his last discourse to the disciples there was one expression that the Saviour frequently repeated, namely, "a little while." It would be well for those who have much to contend with to dwell frequently upon these words. If the path is rugged, if the conflict is severe, if the winds are contrary, the time is not far distant when the toilsome journey will come to an end, when the warfare will be accomplished, and when the desired haven will be reached. We have only to wait, to toil and struggle, to hold fast our confidence without wavering, "a little while;" and all will be quietness and assurance for ever. "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Thus the consideration that ours is a short day, if we have a good hope through grace, should comfort our hearts, as well as inspire us with unwearied diligence in our Christian calling.

2. The command given. "Call the labourers, and give them their hire." In all ages of the world there have been no small amount of injustice and oppression. Solomon says that "he returned and considered all the oppressions that were done under the sun;" and the apostle James, in a strain of indignant rebuke, declares, "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." But in

the case before us the hire of the labourers was not withheld; their toil was promptly and honourably remunerated. Now one thing is absolutely certain that there is no unrighteousness in Him with whom we have to do. By the strictest integrity many of the children of men have been distinguished; any violation of the law of rectitude has been contrary to their very nature, and utterly revolting to all their sentiments and feelings. "Behold, I am here," was the appeal of Samuel, "witness against me before the Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken,? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith?" And can that be in the stream which is not in the fountain whence it flows? Whatever commendable qualities appear in any creature is an indication that the same excellencies, free from every alloy, belong to Him who is the Father of lights, and from whom every good and perfect gift proceedeth. In the whole of his dealings, the Judge of all the earth will assuredly do right. Even in the punishments he inflicts, however severe, the acknowledgment of the penitent malefactor has to be made, "We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." Could the lost persuade themselves that the sentence passed upon them was opposed to the principles of rectitude, they would be soothed by the conviction that wrong had been done to them; that though the power was against them, yet that the right was on their side; that though they were crushed, they could challenge the universe to their vindication, and enlist its sympathy on their behalf. But whatever satisfaction the inmates of the eternal prison-house might derive from such a thought, it is a satisfaction from which they are altogether debarred. They cannot say, We have not been fairly treated; we are victims of arbitrary injustice; and it is in violation of all truth and equity that we are here.

3. The order prescribed. The steward was directed to settle with those first who had been last engaged; and upon this priority, in connection with the amount which these persons received, what is distinctive in the parable mainly turns. "And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny." No direct stipulation had been made with this class concerning their wages, all that was said to them being, that they should get what was right and reasonable. It was left to the generosity of the employer, and the result showed that the confidence placed in him was amply rewarded, for "they received every man a penny." We need scarcely remark that the sum which is here mentioned is not to be confounded with the present coin of that name; it was the Roman *denarius*, and was worth about sevenpence half-penny of our money. Besides, in estimating the value of labour, the price of provisions must be taken into account; and if, as some writers state, this would buy a bushel of corn, the remuneration must be regarded as exceedingly liberal. It was, we may be certain, very much more than they expected.

And how often does God exceed the expectations of his people! Even in the present life he has frequently done so, as many striking instances testify. Jacob had given up all thoughts of ever beholding his beloved Joseph again; but what was he able eventually to say? "I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath also showed me thy seed." When Moses was placed in the ark of bulrushes, the utmost his parents could have hoped for was, that he might be preserved alive, though they should never hear of him any more. But the king's daughter finds him and adopts him as her child, his own mother is appointed nurse to him, he is instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and at length becomes the deliverer of Israel. David said, "I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul;" but after a

number of marvellous escapes, he was delivered from *all* his enemies, and sat upon the throne, a wonder unto many, and a far greater wonder to himself. These are examples of what God did in days of old : and to his people he is still better than their fears, and is wont to give them, not only more than they deserve, but very frequently even more than they desire.

III. THE COMPLAINING.—“ But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more ; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the good man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong : didst not thou agree with me for a penny ? Take that thine is, and go thy way ; I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own ? Is thine eye evil, because I am good ? So the last shall be first, and the first last : for many be called, but few chosen.” We have here—

1. The ground of their murmuring. It was that those who had worked but one hour should have received the same remuneration as themselves. They had laboured from six o'clock in the morning till six in the evening, and it seemed to them unfair that for their larger toil they did not get larger wages. And not only was there this great difference as to the time spent, but all the hardship and fatigue, they contended, had been endured by them. The others only commenced in the cool of the evening, which made their task easy and agreeable, while they had borne the burden and heat of the day. They murmured therefore against the good man of the house, when they only received every man a penny, in common with the rest.

This is doubtless mainly intended to set forth the spirit

with which the Jews regarded the calling of the Gentiles. That event they looked upon, as is well known, with no little dissatisfaction. There was nothing but murmuring among them when they found that the uncircumcised were to be admitted to an equal participation of the blessings of Messiah's reign with themselves. They had long been the chosen people of God; like the elder son in another parable, their language was, "Lo, these many years do we serve thee, neither transgressed we at any time thy commandment:" and the very idea was utterly revolting to their feelings that those who had been worshipping and serving idols, generation after generation, should be made equal to them, receiving the same hire, favoured with the same privileges, and enjoying the same blessings.

2. The reply which it called forth. The murmurers are not told that the others had done as much in one hour as they had done in twelve, and that therefore by their extra diligence they had fairly earned their extra pay. It is true that one individual often performs an amount of labour in one day, that another person could hardly accomplish in a week. And as regards spiritual effort it is very evident that, as a general rule, they are by no means the most useful who have been longest engaged in the Lord's vineyard. Take for example such a case as that of the lamented Spencer of Liverpool, who was called away in the prime and promise of his days. But although he was only permitted, in the mysterious providence of God, to exercise his ministry for a few months, yet in that short period more good was done than has been effected by many who have toiled, and faithfully toiled, for thirty or forty years.

It is not on this ground, however, that the master justifies his conduct on the occasion before us. The reply given embraces two particulars, and in their spiritual application the words may be regarded as setting forth—

(1.) Divine equity. "But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way; I will give unto this last, even as unto thee." An express agreement was made, and what had been promised was strictly fulfilled. If the stipulation had been broken, there would have been ground for complaint; but as such was not the case, to complain was altogether unreasonable. Now, however men may be disposed to find fault with God, and to do so they are exceedingly prone, it is certain, as we have already observed, that none of his dealings are contrary to the principles of rectitude. He calls upon us, "to render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour." And far from us be the thought, that in his own conduct he violates his own injunctions. His law in all its parts is nothing but a transcript of his own perfect character.

(2.) Divine sovereignty. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" The supreme Ruler can distribute his favours as he thinks proper. If he is pleased to give more to one than another, has he not a perfect right to do so? From none will he withhold any equitable claim, for he loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity; but if, in the greatness of his compassion, he may do for some over and above what they have any grounds to look for, should that be any reason for dissatisfaction on our part, or lead us to regard those with envy who are more abundantly blessed than ourselves?

It becomes us at all times, and on all occasions, to be fully satisfied with the divine arrangements. For our wishes to coincide with His, for our wills to be swallowed up in his will, is our highest duty on the one hand, and the chief element of our happiness on the other. Let us therefore aspire after more of the spirit of

the afflicted patriarch, of whom it is said, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." We should "be still, and know that he is God;" and instead of murmuring against him, learn to say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight." "Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them; but the transgressors shall fall therein."

THE CHIEF SEATS.

AND HE PUT FORTH A PARABLE TO THEM WHICH WERE BIDDEN, WHEN HE MARKED HOW THEY CHOSE OUT THE CHIEF ROOMS ; SAYING UNTO THEM, WHEN THOU ART BIDDEN OF ANY MAN TO A WEDDING, SIT NOT DOWN IN THE HIGHEST ROOM, LEST A MORE HONOURABLE MAN THAN THOU BE BIDDEN OF HIM : AND HE THAT BADE THEE AND HIM COME AND SAY TO THEE, GIVE THIS MAN PLACE, &c.—Luke xiv. 7-11.

IN these words the following particulars may be noticed :

I. THAT THE SAVIOUR ADAPTED HIS DISCOURSES TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THOSE BY WHOM HE WAS SURROUNDED.—He neglected no opportunity of imparting instruction ; nor was he backward in reproving what was amiss, and that before persons of all ranks and conditions. But, however faithful, his manner was such as to give no unnecessary offence to those whom he addressed.

II. THAT RELIGION DOES NOT TEACH US TO VIOLATE OR DISREGARD THE COMMON COURTESIES OF LIFE.—To be rude, forward, assuming, is quite opposed to the spirit of the gospel. Let us not then look upon the proprieties of ordinary intercourse as beneath our notice, for the Lord of all condescended to give directions concerning this matter.

III. THAT THINGS WHICH ARE TRIFLING IN THEMSELVES AFFORD A CLEAR INDICATION OF THE RULING PRINCIPLES OF THE MIND.—A person may be on his guard in any important emergency ; and hence his conduct on such an occasion may not be a true index of his actual character. It is in general by inconsiderable circumstances that the bias of the mind is discovered ; and on this account, as well as for many other reasons, small things should not be despised.

IV. THAT MEN OFTEN EXPOSE THEMSELVES TO MUCH THAT IS MORTIFYING BY THEIR OWN FOOLISH BEHAVIOUR. —How humiliated, would those aspiring ones feel who had thrust themselves into the most honourable seats, when ordered to resign their posts in order to make way for their superiors. By pretending to a rank which does not belong to us, we are sure, sooner or later, to be stripped of our false plumes, and become objects of public shame and derision.

V. THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN MAXIMS SO UNIVERSALLY TRUE, THAT EVERY ATTEMPT TO ACT IN OPPOSITION TO THEM MUST PROVE ALTOGETHER UNAVAILING. —Such a maxim we have in the concluding words before us, and which contain the moral of the discourse which the Saviour now delivered. “For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

A CERTAIN MAN WENT DOWN FROM JERUSALEM TO JERICHO, AND FELL AMONG THIEVES, WHICH STRIPPED HIM OF HIS RAIMENT, AND WOUNDED HIM, AND DEPARTED, LEAVING HIM HALF DEAD. AND BY CHANCE THERE CAME DOWN A CERTAIN PRIEST THAT WAY; AND WHEN HE SAW HIM, HE PASSED BY ON THE OTHER SIDE. AND LIKEWISE A LEVITE, WHEN HE WAS AT THE PLACE, CAME AND LOOKED ON HIM, AND PASSED BY ON THE OTHER SIDE. BUT A CERTAIN SAMARITAN, AS HE JOURNEYED, CAME WHERE HE WAS; AND WHEN HE SAW HIM, HE HAD COMPASSION ON HIM, &c.—Luke x. 30-37.

IN expounding this parable, there are three things to be noticed. The first is, the occasion on which it was delivered; secondly, the leading incidents it embraces; and thirdly, the lessons it was intended to inculcate and enforce.

I. THE OCCASION WHICH CALLED FORTH THIS PARABLE.—Here we must take a brief glance at the former narrative, a narrative that contains much that is instructive, and which it is necessary for us to consider, in order to a right understanding of what follows. We have—

1. The lawyer's inquiry. "And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Of all questions this is the most important; it is emphatically the question of questions. The inquiries to which our Lord alludes in his sermon on the mount, namely, "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" are, in themselves, neither unlawful nor unnecessary; but whatever relates to the concerns of the life that now is, sinks into utter insignificance when compared with the attainment of eternal life. Than this, God has nothing greater to bestow,

and the saints in heaven, though their happiness includes what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor mind imagined, have nothing higher or more glorious to enjoy. Eternal life is the climax of all blessedness, and nothing can be more reasonable than for us to inquire how it may be obtained.

2. The source to which he was directed for information. "He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?" It is only from the word of God that light can be obtained on this momentous subject. Nature says, "It is not in me;" her ample, profound, and, in many respects, most instructive volume, leaves the great question unanswered. The poet asks—

"What call we, then, the firmament?
 Call it, the noble pasture of the mind;
 Which there expatiates, strengthens, and exults,
 And riots through the luxuries of thought.
 Call it, the garden of the Deity,
 Blossom'd with stars, redundant in the growth
 Of fruit ambrosial, moral fruit to man.
 Call it, the breast-plate of the true High Priest,
 Ardent with gems oracular, that give,
 In points of highest moment, right response."

To represent the starry heavens as the pasture of the mind, and garden of the Deity, may not be inappropriate; but the latter part of this description is altogether untrue. To man the point of highest moment is, how he can inherit eternal life; but the spacious firmament, studded though it be with glittering gems, far from giving right response on this point, gives no response at all. It is only when we turn from the book of nature to that inspired word which God has magnified above all his name, that we can learn the way of life, the way in which the guilty can be pardoned, and the divine favour secured.

3. The intimate acquaintance with the scriptures which he evinced. To the question, "What is written

in the law? how readest thou?" the lawyer answered at once, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." It appears that the scribes and lawyers differed from the Pharisees, in occupying themselves more with the sacred writings than with the traditions of the elders, which accounts for the correctness of the reply that was now given. It is in perfect harmony with what our Lord stated himself on several occasions, and may be regarded as a summary of the whole duty of man, an epitome of all moral obligations. Were this law of love to God and our fellow-creatures universally acted upon, the present would be a happy world indeed. There would be no wars, no antipathies among nations; no jealousies, no bitter contentions among families or neighbours; no haughtiness or oppression in the rich, no envy or discontent among the poor. All fraud and deceit would be abolished. No heart would burn with anger, no breast kindle with revenge. Violence would be no more heard in the land, wasting nor destruction within our borders. Nothing is wanted to make earth a Paradise but the practical embodiment of this golden rule.

4. The approbation which our Saviour expressed. "And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." He thus gave his own divine sanction to what had been stated; and not only so, but he assured this person that if he fulfilled the royal law to which he had given utterance, he would thereby secure the great blessing after which he had inquired. "The words, 'This do, and thou shalt live,' says Neander, "imply, what indeed is the doctrine of the whole New Testament, that if a man were really capable of a life wholly pervaded by this love, he would lack nothing to justify him before God." But before any one can be really capable of rendering complete and constant obedience to the above precept, it is very

evident that his nature must undergo a radical transformation. If the carnal mind is enmity against God, to love him in the least degree is out of the question while he continues in that state, to say nothing of loving him with all the feelings and affections of the soul. And if in man's heart there is an inherent and deep-rooted selfishness, by which he is led to trample upon the rights of others when they interfere with his own schemes, he cannot love his neighbour as himself, until another and higher principle has dominion over him. While therefore it is true, "This do, and thou shalt live;" to us who have not done what the law requires, the design of the statement is to show the need there is for some other provision; a provision which was partially revealed from the beginning, but which has been fully brought to light through the gospel.

5. The self-righteous spirit which this lawyer displayed. "But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?" There are various ways in which men seek to justify themselves. Some do it by virtually denying their guilt; others by framing excuses to palliate their offences; and others, again, by resting their hopes of heaven upon their own merits. The apostle says concerning the Jews at large, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Such was pre-eminently the spirit of the scribes and Pharisees, and there can be no doubt that such was the case with the present lawyer. At the same time it is probable that the sense in which he used the words, was that of justifying himself for coming to Jesus with such a question. For one whose office it was to study and interpret the Mosaic law, to ask for information on a subject with which he ought to be well acquainted, might seem to require some sort of vindication. He

proceeds therefore to do this, by saying in effect, that while the words of the law were sufficiently distinct, as he had just stated them ; but that to ascertain in what sense those words were to be understood, was a point not so easily settled. So he asks the question, "And who is my neighbour?" That I should love him is evident, but what I want to know is, who are the persons intended by that designation? Is it to be applied to our countrymen alone, or does it also include those who are strangers from the covenants of promise, and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel? To this our Lord replies, not in a direct manner, which would have defeated the object he had in view, but by the beautiful and touching parable contained in the words before us. That such is its character will appear while we endeavour to unfold—

II. THE LEADING INCIDENTS IT EMBRACES.—They may be reduced to three general heads, under the first of which we are called upon to view—

1. An unfortunate traveller. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead." Nothing is said as to who he was, but there can be no doubt of his being a Jew. This the whole narrative implies, and from it all its point and conclusiveness arises. He was on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho, the latter place being about fifteen miles distant from the former. As he journeyed along, he was attacked by thieves, or rather by robbers, who at that time, it seems, greatly abounded in this part of the country. It is recorded by Josephus that Herod had recently dismissed no less than forty thousand workmen, who had been engaged in building the temple ; and the consequence was, that being thus thrown out of employment, a large portion of them became highway robbers. For pursuing such a disgraceful calling this road was peculiarly favourable, as it

passed through one of the most dreary spots in the Holy Land, nearly the whole route being rocky, mountainous, abounding in frightful precipices, and almost uninhabited.

It is probable that the person who was now attacked by these highwaymen was a poor man, for nothing is said about their taking his money from him. It would therefore appear that he had none; and when they found that such was the case, they were doubtless not a little mortified. But since he carried nothing valuable about him, they were determined to get what they could; so they stripped him of his raiment, and took that as some sort of compensation for their loss of richer spoil. Not satisfied, however, with depriving the unhappy creature of his clothing, in their disappointment, and the rage it produced, they inflicted upon him severe bodily injuries; and after wounding him, they departed, leaving him naked and almost expiring.

2. The unfeeling conduct of those by whom he was first discovered. "And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side." As this priest approached, had the poor sufferer been able to recognise him, he would have known at once from his dress that he was one of those who ministered at the sacred altar, and it may be easily imagined that the very sight of him must have gladdened his soul. But, alas! his hopes were soon blasted, and he was again left, unaided and alone, to bewail the wretched fate which had befallen him. Here was one who, in virtue of his very office was especially bound to have compassion on the distressed; one who ought to have well known what that meaneth which is written, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" one that must have often read the requirement, "Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them:" and if to mere irrational creatures in such circumstances, a

helping hand was to be extended, how much more to a fellow-creature ! And in the present case it was not simply a fellow-creature, but a fellow-countryman, yea, a fellow-worshipper ; for in all likelihood he had been to Jerusalem for the purpose of presenting his offerings, and paying his vows, to the Most High. Here then was a professed servant of the God of love, meeting with such a one, meeting with him in the most woful plight imaginable ; and what did he do ? To the eternal disgrace of that holy religion of which he was a minister—" he passed by on the other side."

It is evident that the Jewish priesthood at this time had sunk into a very low state. Such indeed was their general character, that we need not be much surprised at the hard-hearted selfishness which was exhibited on this occasion. And in all subsequent ages persons have been found in the sacred office whose spirit has been sadly at variance with their profession. Having much to do with divine things does not necessarily produce a salutary influence on the minds of those who are thus engaged ; on the contrary, the result is often a fearful amount of spiritual insensibility. Familiarity breeds contempt, according to the old saying ; but it far more frequently breeds indifference. " It is probable that our Lord designed to teach us," as one observes, " that if our ministry does not improve us, and lead us to cherish the tender, hearty benevolence, which so well becomes our office, it hardens us into stones ; just as female modesty, when it is lost, is succeeded by the whore's forehead that cannot blush. If our Lord had not this design, why did he say a priest passed by the wounded man ? Would not a merchant or a soldier have served as well the purpose of the preacher ? And does not history confirm this implied censure on the priest ? Have not men of this order been the inquisitors of the great red dragon, the familiars of the harlot that is drunk with the blood of saints ? Have not those who

ought to have been the ministers of mercy, stood by the stake, and feasted their eyes with the sight of fellow-men burning alive for the truth? For to enter on the ministry of God's church, without a heart touched by divine charity, is to take the first step in a guilty course of selfishness, which ends in all reckless wickedness, and obduracy of soul. 'As troops of robbers wait for a man,' said the prophet Hosea, 'so the company of the priests murder in the way by consent.'"

Had the Saviour in this discourse presented one religious functionary who was devoid of all tenderness and humanity, it would have been a mournful circumstance; but it is still more sad and humiliating when he introduces another of the same class who so much resembled the former. "And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came, and looked on him, and passed by on the other side." It is true that he deserves a little more credit than the other, for while the priest passed on at once, and appeared as if he had not noticed the unfortunate creature: the Levite lingered for a moment, and looked at him, and doubtless pitied him. But whatever pity he felt, it was barren and inoperative, for he also, like his predecessor, passed by on the other side; and thus for the second time the poor man was left unrelieved.

3. The true friend he found in one from whom sympathy and succour were hardly to be expected. "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee." Here there are two circumstances which are especially worthy of notice.

(1.) The individual by whom assistance was rendered. He was "a certain Samaritan," one of that half-pagan, despised, and hated race. Not merely did the Jews hold no intercourse with them, but they regarded them with the most inveterate enmity. Their name was a by-word of reproach; their testimony would not be received in courts of justice; they were openly cursed in the synagogues, and prayers were offered that they might have no part in the resurrection. A Jew would as soon eat swine's flesh as partake of the least morsel of their fare, and would suffer any evil rather than be indebted to them for the most trifling favour. It is also necessary for us to add that the hatred was mutual; the Samaritans entertained the same feelings towards the Jews, that the Jews had towards the Samaritans. Indeed it could scarcely be otherwise, for as nothing is so likely as love to produce love, so enmity cannot fail to produce enmity. But here was one that rose above all national prejudice, all religious bigotry, all hatred, malice, and uncharitableness. In the wounded man he saw a fellow-creature in distress; his sad condition excited his tenderest compassion; and, regardless of all personal considerations, he at once ministered to his relief.

(2.) The manner in which his kindness was shown. It was not done partially; there was a completeness about it which was truly admirable. He went up to the wretched man; he examined the extent of the injuries he had received; he bound up his wounds, probably with a portion of his own garments, and poured into them, or rather *upon* them, oil and wine; he set him upon his own beast, and brought him to an inn, where he paid him every attention which his circumstances required. Nor was that all, for on the following day, before he left to pursue his journey, he committed the invalid to the special charge of the landlord until he was fully restored; he leaves a sum of money to defray

the expenses, a sum considerably larger, both actually and relatively, than the amount specified is with us ; and he also promises, when he comes again, to pay any additional charge, should that prove insufficient. As if he had said to the host, Let the poor man be properly attended to ; supply him with whatever he may require ; and if he expresses any uneasiness as to his inability to remunerate you for your trouble, tell him that all that is provided for already, and that he must not by any means distress his mind on that account. A single act of kindness is valuable, and pleasing to contemplate ; but here there was a series of such acts ; and so it can be said of the charity of the good Samaritan, in the words of the apostle James concerning another grace—it was “ perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

After enlarging upon these particulars, the Saviour appealed to the lawyer, and asked him, “ Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves ? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.” The case was so clear, the proof adduced was so conclusive, as to render it impossible for any other answer to be given. It is true that the fact acknowledged might have been otherwise expressed, for the lawyer’s prejudice, it seems, would not allow him to mention the name of the Samaritan, and so he had recourse to circumlocution ; but whatever circumlocution he might employ, the truth could not possibly be evaded or denied.

We have here a striking instance of the skill of the great Teacher, and the peculiar adaptation of the parabolic method for imparting instruction. Had he answered the lawyer’s question by a direct statement, or a course of argument, or even a quotation from the sacred writings, it is not at all likely that the object he had in view would have been gained. A doctrine so offensive as that of regarding the Samaritans as neighbours, what-

ever reasons might be adduced in its support, or with whatever eloquence it might be advocated, would have been rejected by him with proud disdain. But by relating this simple story, his attention was awakened, his prejudices were disarmed, his understanding was enlightened, his judgment was convinced, and, we would fain hope, his conscience was touched, and his heart deeply and permanently affected. But let us now, having thus noticed the leading incidents which this parable embraces, proceed to consider in the last place—

III. THE LESSONS IT WAS INTENDED TO INCULCATE AND ENFORCE.—We are here shown—

1. That extensive knowledge and orthodox sentiments are unavailing unless they lead to practical results. This lawyer, as we have seen, was familiarly acquainted with the scriptures; he well knew what the divine requirements were; but to know is one thing, to do is another. Now the special lesson which the Saviour urged upon him had reference to the latter particular; it was, “Go, and *do* thou likewise.” Against knowledge, and especially religious knowledge, we dare not say a word, being no believers in the popish dogma that ignorance is the mother of devotion; at the same time mere knowledge will only increase our condemnation unless it be reduced to practice. As an old writer observes, “Knowledge, like Rachel, is beautiful; but obedience, like Leah, is fruitful.” Let us be anxious to combine the beauty of the one with the fruitfulness of the other; for our Lord says, “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

2. That the relief of those who are in distress, while it is a dictate of our common humanity, is especially enjoined and recommended by the religion of Christ. On no subject are its precepts more frequent, more unambiguous, more decisive. We are commanded to “deal our bread to the hungry, and send a portion to those for whom nothing is prepared.” We are told that

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” We are assured that, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” We are asked, and the question deserves to be seriously pondered—“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” In a manner still more impressive are we called upon to exercise the duties of beneficence by the conduct of the Lord Jesus, who hath left us an example that we should follow his steps. Of him it is emphatically said, “that he went about doing good.” The hungry he fed, the sick he recovered, the miserable he consoled. Sorrow never met his eye unpitied, and never left his presence unrelieved. Let us then abound in works of faith and labours of love; for thus only shall we possess the mind of Christ on the one hand, and exemplify the benevolent spirit of the gospel on the other.

3. That we should regard all as neighbours, however separated by various adventitious circumstances, to whom we have an opportunity of doing good. The wisdom that is from above is not only “full of mercy and good fruits,” but it is “*without partiality* and without hypocrisy.” In the grace of charity the Jews were not generally deficient, but theirs was a partial charity; it was only extended to their own nation, and all besides they looked upon as enemies, whom they were under no obligations to relieve. Now the charity which this parable inculcates is of a very different character; it is expansive, unsectarian, divine. It is the charity of Him who is not the God of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles; of Him who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust. Upon the fields of the man who blasphemes his name and defies his authority, he causes the sun-

beams to fall and the rain-drops to descend, as richly and seasonably as on the fields of those who acknowledge him in all their ways, and present to him their grateful homage for his many favours. Thus the fact of a person being an enemy to us is no reason why we should withhold our aid from him, if he is in circumstances that require it. The question we should ask ourselves is not, What has his conduct been towards me, but how am I required to act in reference to him? In a word, to friends and foes, to the distant and the near, let us show kindness as we have opportunity for so doing. Where there is suffering, let us do all we can to alleviate it; where there is want, let us feel that there is an imperative call upon us to relieve it. Therefore to the question, "Who is my neighbour?" the answer is, Each and all who require the help which you are able to render. Towards such, wherever found, you are to act a neighbour's part, and prove a friend indeed.

4. That in seeking to benefit our fellow-creatures we should be prepared to make personal sacrifices. The Samaritan did so; he denied himself of his own ease, he lost much precious time, and he incurred no small risk as to his own safety, for the thieves might be still near, so that by tarrying in such a place he was in danger of being attacked every moment. Thus it cost him not a little, to say nothing of the money he expended, to do what he did. But he was well repaid for it all, as those who perform deeds of disinterested and self-denying kindness always are. It has been well said, "that whatever privation the benefactor may have endured for want of the oil and wine which he had expended in an attempt to heal the wounds of the Jew, he would find the luxury of doing good more delicious than any other refreshment; and whatever fatigue he may have felt in walking, the heaven would shine over his head with its brightest crystal, the air would refresh him with its most balmy breezes, earth would spread her softest

carpet of flowers beneath his feet, and all creation conspire to gladden the heart that had pity on an injured and dying foe. Say not this is poetry. It is sober truth. No man can do acts of kindness like these, without enjoying the approving testimony of God and of conscience, which is 'the soul's sweet sunshine, and the heart-felt joy.' "

5. That whatever we can do for others is infinitely less than what has been done for us. The method which has been often adopted of spiritualising this parable is very objectionable ; at the same time all, and far more than all, that the Samaritan did will apply to the Lord Jesus. He saw us ruined by the fall, weltering in our blood, stripped of our glory, robbed of our strength ; and what did he do ? He passed by us, but not on the other side. In his boundless compassion he espoused our cause, and interposed on our behalf. When we were lying in sin and misery, and on the confines of eternal death, he supplied the sovereign balm, even his own most precious blood, and covered our spiritual nakedness with the costly robe of his perfect and everlasting righteousness. Well may the poet say—

“ With pitying eyes the Prince of grace
Beheld our helpless grief ;
He saw, and oh, amazing love !
He ran to our relief.

Oh, for this love let rocks and hills
Their lasting silence break,
And all harmonious human tongues
The Saviour's praises speak.”

THE HOUSE SWEEPED AND GARNISHED.

WHEN THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT IS GONE OUT OF A MAN, HE WALKETH THROUGH DRY PLACES, SEEKING REST, AND FINDETH NONE. THEN HE SAITH, I WILL RETURN INTO MY HOUSE FROM WHENCE I CAME OUT; AND WHEN HE IS COME, HE FINDETH IT EMPTY, &c. —Mat. xii. 43-45.

THE subject of demoniacal possession, on which the ground-work of this parable is founded, is attended with considerable difficulty. The words before us, in their literal reference, are also somewhat obscure; but, spiritually regarded, their meaning is more obvious. We have—

I. A MISERABLE CONDITION INDICATED.—It is that of a man under the influence of an evil spirit.

1. This influence is powerful. It cannot be otherwise, for the demon is *in* him, controlling and directing all the springs of action.

2. It is defiling. The spirit by whom he is possessed is called an unclean spirit; and what must it be for such an impure agent to work upon the evil tendencies of a previously corrupt heart!

II. AN AGREEABLE DELIVERANCE EXPERIENCED.—From what is stated concerning the expulsion or voluntary withdrawment of this spirit, it appears that men may undergo a considerable change for the better without being truly converted.

1. In the word of God this truth is frequently set forth. On no subject are its statements more abundant, or more decisive.

2. It is confirmed by innumerable instances. Saul, the first king of Israel, had “another heart;” but his whole history shows that he was, notwithstanding, a stranger to vital godliness.

3. This subject demands serious thought, and rigorous self-examination.

III. A FEARFUL RELAPSE DESCRIBED.

1. When the evil spirit returned, he found the house unoccupied. It was empty, swept, and garnished.

2. The return of the spirit under these circumstances was easily effected.

3. The consequences attending this re-possession were truly awful. "The last state of that man is worse than the first."

RAVENING WOLVES.

BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS, WHICH COME TO YOU IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING, BUT INWARDLY THEY ARE RAVENING WOLVES. YE SHALL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUITS. DO MEN GATHER GRAPES OF THORNS, OR FIGS OF THISTLES? EVEN SO EVERY GOOD TREE BRINGETH FORTH GOOD FRUIT, &c.—Matt. vii. 15-20.

THE principle laid down in these words is, that a man's conduct indicates his true character. That principle, the importance of which cannot be overrated, we shall consider in three separate aspects.

I. AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE WELL-KNOWN COMPARISON WHICH IS HERE EMPLOYED.—There is always a correspondence between a tree and its produce. “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”

II. IN REFERENCE TO THE SPECIAL CHARACTERS WHICH ARE HERE DESCRIBED.—We have—

1. Their office. The word “prophet,” although it originally signifies one who foretells future events, is often used as a general designation for all public teachers of religion. The literal reference of this passage is evidently to the scribes and Pharisees.

2. Their outward aspect. To come in sheep's clothing indicates their sanctimoniousness. They appeared to be eminently devout persons, and many regarded them as being so in reality.

3. Their evil designs. Notwithstanding their seeming innocence and gentleness, they were fierce, rapacious, extortionate, greedy of gain, and even addicted to plunder. “Inwardly they were ravening wolves.”

III. IN ITS GENERAL APPLICATION.—“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

1. This is the only sure standard by which to judge either of ourselves or others. Profession is deceptive ;

frames and feelings are not to be depended upon ; nothing but the fruits of holiness are a decisive proof of our spiritual condition. “ Little children, let no man deceive you ; he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as God is righteous.”

2. According to this rule the decisions of the great day will be regulated. To all who come short of the practical requirements of the gospel, it will then be said, “ I never knew you ; depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

THE LOST PIECE OF SILVER.

EITHER WHAT WOMAN HAVING TEN PIECES OF SILVER, IF SHE LOSE ONE PIECE, DOETH NOT LIGHT A CANDLE, AND SWEEP THE HOUSE, AND SEEK DILIGENTLY TILL SHE FIND IT? AND WHEN SHE HATH FOUND IT, SHE CALLETH HER FRIENDS AND HER NEIGHBOURS TOGETHER, SAYING, REJOICE WITH ME, FOR I HAVE FOUND THE PIECE WHICH I HAD LOST. LIKEWISE, I SAY UNTO YOU, THERE IS JOY IN THE PRESENCE OF THE ANGELS OF GOD OVER ONE SINNER THAT REPENTETH.—Luke xv. 8-10.

ONE of the distinguishing features of the great Teacher was the frequent repetitions which appear in his discourses. In this, as in many other particulars, he displayed no ordinary condescension. Those whom he addressed, not excepting his own disciples, were dull of understanding; and so he had to give them line upon line, precept upon precept, illustration upon illustration. In him dwelt all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and such being the case, he might have astonished his hearers by the perpetual variety of his thoughts, and the endless changes of his language. But to fill them with wonder was not the object at which he aimed; it was rather to enlighten their dark minds, and impress the truth upon their obdurate hearts.

We are furnished with an instance of this in the parable before us, when viewed in connection with the one immediately preceding. It is true that there are slight shades of difference between them; but their general structure, as well as their express design, are identical. Such being the case, there will be no necessity for us to enlarge at any length upon the separate items which are specified, having already considered the leading principle which pervades the entire discourse.

It is a simple incident drawn from domestic life that

is here recorded. The woman spoken of was evidently in humble circumstances, and the following particulars are set forth concerning her.

1. The loss she sustained. Almost everything is to be viewed relatively; and when thus regarded, what is insignificant in itself frequently becomes a matter of considerable importance. In the present instance it would seem that all this woman possessed were ten pieces of silver, so that to lose one of them would be to her no trifling loss. It may be remarked that the present parable occupies, in this respect, an intermediate place in relation to the other parables contained in the chapter. While the shepherd lost one sheep out of a hundred, and the father lost one son out of two, she lost one coin out of ten.

2. The course she adopted. She did not indulge in vain and fruitless lamentations, but at once bestirred herself. She lit a candle, and swept the house, and searched diligently until she found it. Nothing was left undone, for her efforts were careful, active, persevering, and at length successful.

3. The gladness she felt. It was so great that she called her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her. "The heart knoweth," says the wise man, "its own bitterness;" but while sorrow, in proportion as it is deep and crushing, is kept to oneself, and brooded over in silence and solitude, with joy it is quite the reverse. All pleasurable emotions are communicative, and we are deprived of much of their sweetness, unless there are others to share them with us.

But in addition to, and in immediate connection with, the case which is here described, we have a most important and interesting truth announced. It is contained in the verse with which the parable is concluded. "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." To this striking statement our attention will now be mainly directed. And we commence by observing—

I. THAT AMONG THE VARIOUS EVENTS WHICH TRANSPIRE ON EARTH THERE IS ONE THAT PRE-EMINENTLY DRAWS THE ATTENTION, AND EXCITES THE LIVELIEST INTEREST OF THE ANGELIC HOSTS.—For our knowledge of this fact we are altogether indebted to the disclosures of the sacred volume. Had not revelation broken the silence of nature, we should not have known that any thing which happened here was noticed in heaven. But now we are informed most distinctly, that there are occurrences taking place in this lower world which are full of interest to the inhabitants of that pure and perfect world above.

And what is it that engages their attention? Not the objects which engross so much of the thoughts of the children of men. The extension of empires, the discoveries of philosophy, the treasures of art, the decrees of senates, the consultations of warriors, the splendour of palaces, and the pomp of kings—these are not the things in which those holy and lofty beings are interested; such matters, we may suppose, have but trifling charms for them. The repentance of a poor sinner, his conversion from the error of his ways, is invested in their estimation with greater attractions than any event besides. From the empty displays, the glittering nonentities, which fill the circle of human vanity, and fire the ardent wishes of mankind, they turn away to witness the sorrows of the most obscure penitent, and from their radiant thrones they listen with ineffable satisfaction to his secret moanings.

II. THAT IF THE REPENTANCE OF A SINNER BE THUS REGARDED BY THE CELESTIAL LEGIONS, IT IS EVIDENT THAT IT CANNOT BE THE INSIGNIFICANT THING THAT MANY IMAGINE.—We are often depressed on the one hand, and transported on the other, by the veriest trifles. But with angels it is not so. Their exalted natures, their mighty intellects, their clear and comprehensive views, are a sufficient guarantee that by nothing trivial can their minds be impressed, or their sympathies awakened.

It is recorded of the Saviour, in the account given of the centurion, who came to him on behalf of his servant, that he marvelled at him. What a view does this circumstance afford of the truly wonderful nature of that which, in such a mind as his, could call forth such a feeling! He who marvelled not at earthly wonders, was amazed at the strange union of humility and faith which appeared in this pagan soldier, saying, "I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel." So in the case before us. As, when Jesus marvelled, there must have been something that truly called for his marvelling: in like manner, when angels rejoice, there must be something that truly calls for their rejoicing. Nothing trifling could possibly operate in the one case or the other.

But in taking a brief glance at the event which excites such a feeling in the breasts of these exalted beings, it may be viewed in a two-fold aspect. Whether we consider its relative or its intrinsic importance, we shall see sufficient grounds to justify the deep interest with which it is regarded.

1. Its relative importance. What is insignificant in itself has often led to results the most momentous. It was a simple thing for a boy to hold a tube to his eye, and yet from that circumstance Galileo was led to construct the first telescope. It was a simple thing for a log of wood to float on the sea from the westward, yet from that piece of timber Columbus inferred the existence, and at length actually discovered the vast continent of America. It was a simple thing for an apple to drop from a tree, yet from its fall Sir Isaac Newton ascertained the principle of gravitation, a principle which pervades universal nature, and unites the whole of its parts in harmony together. These, and many other instances which might be mentioned, show to us what great events frequently arise from very small beginnings.

But these things, the marvels of the world of science,

over which, if a fiction of the imagination be allowable in such a connection, the guardian spirit of discovery rejoices ; what are they, after all, when compared with the marvels of the moral and spiritual world ! Of the latter class we give the following as an example. Many years ago the excellent Mr. Jay, of Bath, preached a sermon in Surrey chapel at one of his visits to the metropolis. It was blessed to the conversion of a young man who happened to be present, who subsequently became a useful minister of the gospel. He was settled for some time in the town of Reading, and among his hearers on a certain Sabbath evening was a wild youth, who had embraced sceptical views, and was much given to turn sacred things into ridicule. It was his intention on the following week to leave his native land, unknown to any one ; but he said, with an oath, that he would turn methodist before going, although nothing was further from his expectation, and in reality nothing further from his desire. He went, however, to hear the minister preach, and the thoughtless one was arrested, so that he who went to scoff remained to pray. He also became a servant of Christ, and was well known as Timothy East, of Birmingham. Like Mr. Jay, he was in the habit of going once a year to London, being one of the supplies at the Tabernacle in Moorfields. A young man, under somewhat peculiar circumstances, was induced to attend there one evening when Mr. East was preaching from the words, " What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? " The arrows of conviction entered his heart, and soon after he found joy and peace through believing. His name was John Williams, who turned out to be one of the most devoted and successful missionaries of modern times.

Now let this incident, or rather series of incidents, be connected with the Saviour's declaration in the words of our text, and it will be seen what we mean by the

relative importance of the event referred to. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over *one* sinner that repenteth:" and what wonder when such consequences may flow from a single conversion. Should any regard the repentance of the young man under Mr. Jay's sermon as an ordinary occurrence, all must acknowledge that in its results it was far otherwise. His conversion led to that of Timothy East; the conversion of Timothy East led to that of John Williams; the conversion of John Williams led to that of thousands of idolaters in the southern seas; and what their conversion may lead to, will not be fully known until the disclosures of the great day.

At the birth of John the Baptist it was asked, "What manner of child shall this be?" So when the second birth of any one takes place, similar language may be used. Who can tell what manner of man, as regards eminence and usefulness, he may become? That cruel persecutor, with the fires of hell glaring in his eyes, what is likely to become of him? He is a chosen vessel to convey the heavenly treasure far hence among the Gentiles. The faith he once sought to destroy he is to preach through widely-extended regions, so that from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, innumerable triumphs of mercy shall be achieved by him in the Saviour's name. That solitary monk, whose attention has been drawn to the volume of eternal truth, and who is so anxiously perusing its long neglected pages; what is likely to become of him? He will prove one of the noblest spiritual heroes which modern ages have produced: one that will bid defiance to popes and cardinals, and be prepared at the call of duty to march fearlessly onward, even should there be as many devils in the place to which that duty urged him, as there were tiles upon the houses. That profane tinker, who has begun to weep on account of his sins, and earnestly to pray for mercy: what is likely to become of

him? God will turn the tinker into a successful preacher, and not only so, but into a matchless dreamer; and by his prison thoughts he is to be the means of helping many a weary pilgrim onward from the city of destruction, over one hill of difficulty and another, even to the shining city above. That cobbler on his stall, with his serious musings, while stitching and hammering away; what is likely to become of him? God is going to make the humble artizan into a Dr. Carey, and appoint him his own instrument for placing in the hands of the teeming myriads of the East, the glorious charter of salvation. So with some around us, such as that boy in the Sabbath class, once so thoughtless, but of late so attentive to his teacher; what will become of him? Who can tell? Perhaps when the church history of China will be written in after ages, an answer to the question may there be given.

In bringing these instances to bear upon our present subject, we do not mean to imply that angels are endowed with the attribute of foreknowledge, and that when they rejoice over a repentant sinner they are aware of all the consequences that will issue from his repentance. A general view, however, from their exalted position, and their large experience of the divine ways, they undoubtedly have. They know what mighty results have followed in other cases. They likewise know that the influence exerted by the most obscure convert is far from being inconsiderable, and that whenever men are blessed, it is in order that they might be made a blessing. Hence on the relative ground to which we have been adverting there is joy, devout, ardent, exulting joy, in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

2. But in addition to the relative, there is also the intrinsic importance of this event. Some things derive all their interest from their consequences; but such is by no means the case as regards the present subject.

The conversion of a sinner in itself, without any reference whatever to its bearings upon others, is an occurrence so momentous, that it throws every secular transaction into the shade.

“The damnation of one soul,” it has been said, “is an evil infinitely greater than the subversion of a thousand millions of kingdoms.” Nor is the statement exaggerated, for on such a theme whatever words are used, and whatever comparisons are adopted, however strong and emphatic, instead of being extravagant, are within the bounds of truth and soberness. Yea, for a thousand millions of kingdoms, let us substitute a thousand millions of worlds: yet the damnation of a single soul is a calamity infinitely greater than the utter destruction of them all. Kingdoms and worlds are at best only finite and temporal, but the soul is deathless and eternal.

“The sun is but a spark of fire,
A transient meteor in the sky;
The soul immortal as its sire,
Shall never die!”

Now of this angels are deeply conscious. They know full well what is involved in the soul's everlasting damnation, and also what is involved in the soul's everlasting salvation. Well therefore may they rejoice when the sinner passes from his exposure to the one state, and becomes an heir of all the untold blessedness of the other.

III. THAT IF THE CONVERSION OF A SINNER IS AN EVENT THAT CAUSES JOY IN HEAVEN, THE CIRCUMSTANCE LOUDLY CALLS UPON MEN TO REPENT.—Inasmuch as the statement before us was uttered by Him who is the faithful witness, its truth is undoubted; and therefore we are fully warranted to say to you, individually, that your repentance would kindle the most rapturous delight among the celestial powers, and call forth their warmest

congratulations. 'As soon as they received the blissful tidings their language would be, This our brother was dead and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. Glory be to God! another brand has been plucked from the burning; the ranks of the enemy have been made thinner; one heart more glows with heavenly fire, one lip more has become vocal with the common theme, and one hand more will now be employed in the glorious work of hastening the coming of our Emmanuel's kingdom!

And shall those blessed beings be debarred, oh sinner, from such gratification as far as thou art concerned? Is thy language, Angels shall not rejoice over me; or does thy conduct indicate that such is thy determination? We would fain hope that this is not the case, and trusting that thou art otherwise inclined, we now say to thee, "Repent, and be converted, that thy sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Oh, turn to God, and that with full purpose of heart. He commands you to do so, and every encouragement is also given to induce you to listen to his voice, and comply with this most reasonable requirement. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Only act in accordance with this divine injunction, and, though men may scoff, and even beloved friends become displeased, yet angels will greatly rejoice.

IV. THAT WHILE THERE IS JOY IN HEAVEN ON ACCOUNT OF SUCH AN EVENT, IT OUGHT TO BE REGARDED BY US WITH THE SAME FEELINGS.—On the arrival at Antioch of one of the early evangelists, namely, Barnabas, the following statement is given as to how he felt and acted on the occasion: "Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, *was glad*, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.'

The sacred historian adds, "For he was a good man;" and the spirit he then manifested clearly evinced that such was the case. Yea, not only did he show that he was a good man, but that he was a truly angelic man. "What an angelic creature!" is an exclamation that is often called forth by the sight of eminent personal attractions; indeed the flattering epithet is hardly ever used in any other connection. The celebrated Edmund Burke, when describing an illustrious but unfortunate princess, says, "that never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she had just began to move in, glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy." Now in reference to such a one the word "angelic" would be regarded by most persons as eminently appropriate. But if we can lay no claim to being angelic in that sense, we may become entitled to it in another and far higher one. We can be angelic by possessing an angelic disposition; and if the salvation of souls fills our hearts with joy and gladness, we can then comfort ourselves with the assurance that the mind which is in them is in us also.

Oh, perish the foul spirit of the scribes and Pharisees, who murmured, saying, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Perish the narrow, selfish, and most repulsive temper of the elder brother, in whose unsympathising bosom not a single spark of gratitude was kindled, not the faintest throb of satisfaction and delight was felt, when a lost brother was restored, and the dead brought to life again! If men are led to the Saviour, by whatever means or through whatever agency; if devils are cast out, even should those who eject them follow not with us; if Christ be preached, preached with simplicity, faithfulness, and success—let our language be with the large-hearted apostle, "I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

At the same time, if our joy at the conversion of sinners be sincere, we shall endeavour to promote their conversion in every possible way. This is a privilege from which angels are debarred. Rejoice over the returning sinner, minister to him as an heir of salvation, surround his dying couch and waft his disembodied spirit to the everlasting mansions, they may and do ; but they are not permitted to take any part in producing the great change whereby he becomes an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. How gladly would the angel which was sent to Cornelius have made known the name of Jesus to that anxious inquirer ! But no ; silence seals his lips on that transporting theme ; all he had to do was to inform the centurion of one Simon, whose surname was Peter, who lodged at the tanner's house by the sea-side in Joppa ; and from him he was to hear those words, whereby he and all his house might be saved. This is the divinely appointed method, that men should be told of the way of salvation through their fellow-men. Let us then, each one in his appointed sphere, make known the glad tidings to those around us. This honour hath not ministers alone, but all the saints. The most obscure and illiterate disciple may thus become the means of turning men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Well might the apostle James conclude his epistle by saying, " Let him know that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his ways : " Know what ? Let him know that he has been instrumental in accomplishing a work of all others the most blessed and important, even that of saving a soul from death, and covering a multitude of sins. Let him also know that thereby he increases the bliss of principalities and powers in heavenly places : yea, let him know that he heightens the joy and intensifies the ineffable raptures of the great Redeemer himself, for in the case of every true penitent he sees afresh of the travail of his soul and is satisfied.

THE FAITHFUL AND WISE SERVANT.

WHO THEN IS A FAITHFUL AND WISE SERVANT, WHOM HIS LORD HATH MADE RULER OVER HIS HOUSEHOLD, TO GIVE THEM MEAT IN DUE SEASON? BLESSED IS THAT SERVANT, WHOM HIS LORD WHEN HE COMETH SHALL FIND SO DOING. VERILY I SAY UNTO YOU, THAT HE SHALL MAKE HIM RULER OVER ALL HIS GOODS. BUT AND IF THAT EVIL SERVANT SHALL SAY IN HIS HEART, MY LORD DELAYETH HIS COMING, &c.—Mat. xxiv. 45-51.

I. THE CHARACTER DESCRIBED.—It is that of a servant of Christ, concerning whom the following particulars are pointed out.

1. The features by which he is distinguished. They are those of fidelity and wisdom. Faithfulness consists in endeavouring conscientiously to fulfil, to the best of our ability, the various obligations which devolve upon us. By wisdom, the other quality that is here specified, it is not mere knowledge that is intended. The two are altogether distinct; and hence it happens that great men, men of eminent gifts and attainments, are not always wise. As the poet observes—

“Knowledge and wisdom, far from being one
Have oft-times no connection. Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
Knowledge, a rude, unprofitable mass,
The mere materials with which wisdom builds.”

2. The office with which he was entrusted. He was appointed ruler over the household. While ministers are not to be lords over God's heritage, it is evident that they are invested with some measure of authority as is shown in many passages. “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and

are *over you* in the Lord, and admonish you ; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves ; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you."

3. The special work assigned to him. He was to provide for the wants of the household, by giving them meat in due season. Thus in his charge to the elders of Ephesus the apostle says, "Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."

II. THE RECOMPENSE PROMISED.—According to the representation which is here given, it will be composed of two leading elements.

1. Approbation. "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." If we are diligent in the service of our divine Master, we shall be sure to receive his gracious approval ; and in the possession of that approval, what unspeakable blessedness is involved !

2. Promotion. "Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods." He will be raised to greater honour and dignity in consequence of the wisdom and faithfulness with which he conducted himself in a subordinate capacity. It will be said to him, not only, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant : " but, "thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

III. A SAD ALTERNATIVE INDICATED.

1. The grounds of his supposed misconduct. Under the influence of carnal security he might be tempted to say, "My lord delayeth his coming : " and in a spirit of unbelief begin even to harbour the thought that, having stayed away so long, he might not come at all.

2. The lengths to which it was possible for his evil doings to be carried. "And shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken." Here is abominable tyranny, and the indulgence of gross sensuality.

3. The fearful punishment with which he would be visited. "The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of; and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

THE TEN POUNDS.

A CERTAIN NOBLEMAN WENT INTO A FAR COUNTRY TO RECEIVE FOR HIMSELF A KINGDOM, AND TO RETURN. AND HE CALLED HIS TEN SERVANTS, AND DELIVERED THEM TEN POUNDS, AND SAID UNTO THEM, OCCUPY TILL I COME. BUT HIS CITIZENS HATED HIM, AND SENT A MESSAGE AFTER HIM, SAYING, WE WILL NOT HAVE THIS MAN TO REIGN OVER US. AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT WHEN HE WAS RETURNED, HAVING RECEIVED THE KINGDOM, THAT HE COMMANDED THESE SERVANTS TO BE CALLED UNTO HIM, TO WHOM HE HAD GIVEN THE MONEY, THAT HE MIGHT KNOW HOW MUCH EVERY MAN HAD GAINED BY TRADING. THEN CAME THE FIRST, SAYING, LORD, THY POUND HATH GAINED TEN POUNDS. AND HE SAID TO HIM, WELL, THOU GOOD SERVANT; BECAUSE THOU HAST BEEN FAITHFUL IN A VERY LITTLE, HAVE THOU AUTHORITY OVER TEN CITIES. AND THE SECOND CAME, SAYING, LORD, THY POUND HATH GAINED FIVE POUNDS, &c.—Luke xix. 12-27.

THE immediate design of this parable appears from what is stated in the preceding verse. Our blessed Lord was now at Jericho, in the house of Zaccheus; and after making the chief of the publicans a trophy of his grace, he declared the important truth that the object of his mission was to seek and to save those who were lost. It is then stated, “And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.”

There were two mistaken notions entertained by the people concerning the kingdom of God, and not by the people alone, but by the disciples also. First, their views of its nature were altogether erroneous. The kingdom they looked for was a temporal one; they expected that their nation, which had been so highly favoured of heaven, and on whose behalf the mighty hand and outstretched arm of the Almighty had been so

often put forth, would be liberated from the Roman yoke, and be restored to more than its ancient glory and prosperity. But, secondly, they were under a false impression as to the time of its establishment; and it is to this that reference is here made. That Jesus was the long-promised Messiah had now become, if not the general opinion, yet it was held by a large number; and in consequence of the wonderful works he performed, the conviction was gaining strength day after day in the minds of the great bulk of the community. They therefore concluded that the period was at hand when he would cast off the disguise he had hitherto assumed, and take to himself his great power and reign. He was now going to Jerusalem, and as that was the seat of empire, the royal city, the city of David and Solomon, yea, the city of God, of which such glorious things were spoken, they felt assured that the object of his present journey thither was to set up his throne, and allow the assembled tribes to proclaim him as their own anointed king. Now it was to undeceive them in this respect that the parable before us was delivered. He here shows that he was about to remove to a distant region, and that it would be yet a long season before he would manifest himself, and openly appear in his kingdom. Such being the case his servants, instead of being promoted at once to posts of honour, and be allowed to share in the spoils of conquest, would have to continue in the field of labour, and wait in the faithful discharge of duty for the return of their Lord.

But in glancing at the leading features of this parable, we notice—

I. THE NOBLEMAN'S DEPARTURE.—In connection therewith there are three particulars to be considered.

1. The object of his journey. "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return." What is here stated appears strange to us, but it would not be so to our Saviour's

hearers, for at that time such a thing often occurred. Judea was now a province of the Roman empire, having been conquered by Pompey about sixty years before Christ. But it had still its native rulers, who exercised authority as tetrarchs or viceroys. Of course they had to be recognised by the emperor, which made it necessary for them to visit the imperial city; so that when any one left Palestine to go to Rome for such a purpose, it could be said in the words before us, that he went to receive a kingdom. Such was the case with Herod, that aspiring Edomite; also with his son Archelaus, who was particularly noted for his cruelty; and likewise Agrippa, the grandson of the former.

So with the Lord Jesus, whom the nobleman spoken of here evidently represents. He went not to the Roman metropolis, but to a more distant region; not to the court of the Cæsars, but to one far higher; and his object in going there was to be invested with regal power, a power unlimited in its range, even "all power both in heaven and on earth." The kingdom he was going to receive was that which his eternal Father had promised to him as the Son of man, in contradistinction to the supreme and absolute dominion which was already his, and had for ever belonged to him as the Son of God. To this the prophet Daniel refers when describing the wonderful visions with which he was favoured: "I saw and, behold, one like the Son of man came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him; and there was given to him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him." The apostle Peter also declares, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, (or to his right hand,) and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself,

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." To the same occasion the striking words in the second Psalm allude: "Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." We have here his inauguration as Head over all things to the church. The words, "this day have I begotten thee," do not refer to his incarnation, or the time when his mortal existence commenced, but to his resurrection, when he entered upon a life altogether different from that which he had formerly led; a life not of subjection, but of power and authority; not of obloquy and suffering, but of boundless bliss and inconceivable glory.

2. What the nobleman did previous to his going away. "And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come." Solomon asks, "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" To give at least a negative answer to the question is not difficult, for there are some things which are certainly *not* good for him. For example, it is not good for man that he should be alone; a state of isolation was undesirable even before the fall, and it is much more so at present. But in a special sense it can be said that it is not good for him to be unemployed. As Bishop Hall remarks, "Our idle days are always the devil's busiest days;" and the apostle represents idlers as talkers and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not, and doing with their unbridled tongues no small amount of mischief. This nobleman, therefore, wisely gave his servants something to do during his absence; and our divine Master deals with us in a simi-

lar manner. Although he does not personally need our efforts, yet we need them ourselves, both for our safety and advantage. They are needed also by others; our brother needs them for his relief, the church for its edification, and the world for its moral improvement and conversion to God. Matthew Henry used to pray for "a heart full of love, a head full of schemes, and hands full of work;" a prayer which was signally answered, for how much was he enabled to do, especially in composing his invaluable commentary. He was cut off, it is true, before that herculean task was completed, which reminds us of what was once said concerning him, that he died in the Acts of the Apostles. "There I should like to be when I die," replied the person to whom the remark was made. In no acts can we be so worthily and profitably engaged when we are summoned hence, as those of that devoted, self-denying, noble-minded band, each and all of whom could say, in the language of one of their number, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

The servants of this nobleman were not left to employ themselves just as they pleased; the nature of their work was prescribed by him, which was that of trading. For this purpose he supplied them with the necessary capital, and said, "Occupy till I come." The word "occupy" is generally used to denote possession; but here it signifies not merely to keep, but to employ, to improve, to use advantageously. They were to take care of the money, and see that it was not lost; but more than that, they were to do their utmost to increase it, and make as much profit as possible out of it.

It was not a large amount that was committed to them, so that the engagements they were required to enter into would be on a comparatively limited scale. In another parable, similar in many respects to this, it was otherwise. There one servant received no less than five talents; and the difference between a single talent and

a single pound is very great, the one being about sixty times the value of the other. Besides, on the present occasion all the servants were intrusted with the same sum, while on the other it varied considerably. Now both representations, spiritually regarded, are equally true. What we are as sinners may be applied to the matter under consideration, namely, our character as stewards. In one sense the human family differ widely from each other as regards moral condition. If we pass from one end of the scale to the other we behold an amazing contrast. The sins of man range from trifling and inadvertent slips on the one hand, to the most enormous atrocities on the other; from the slight and venial error which an angel might almost overlook, to those horrible and daring crimes which are sufficient to fill even demons with fear and trembling. But in another sense the most moral and the most profligate stand on the same level; between both "there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." So with our endowments, and capabilities, and various opportunities; if in some respects they differ, they have much in common at the same time. As persons, whatever their bodily stature, appear of the same height when viewed from some lofty elevation; so when we rise above all adventitious circumstances, we find that the rich and poor, the learned and ignorant, meet together. Their points of diversity are swallowed up in their essential identity.

But to proceed with the narrative. We have seen that the object of this nobleman in going to a far country was to receive for himself a kingdom, and we have also seen what he did previous to his departure. Let us now notice—

3. The attempt that was made to frustrate his purpose. "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us." What is here stated literally occurred in the

case of Archelaus, to whom we have already alluded. His barbarous and tyrannical disposition appears from the fact, that when the parents of our Lord returned from Egypt they were afraid to settle in the province over which he ruled, but repaired to Galilee, as a place of greater safety. His character for cruelty was well known before his father's death; and when, after that event took place, he went to Rome to have his title confirmed, the Jews sent a deputation of fifty persons, to request that they might be permitted to live under a Roman governor, rather than have him for their king.

In this there was nothing strange; but that cannot be said of their conduct towards another who claimed their allegiance, even the Lord Jesus. No wonder that the son of Herod was hated by them, but who can justify their hatred of the Son of God? That such was the feeling with which they regarded him is too evident to be denied. He himself charged them, in language the most explicit, with having hated both him and his Father, and added, "But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause." Such being the case, they refused to submit to his authority, and in a spirit of determined opposition declared, "We will not have this man to reign over us." In the presence of Pilate they openly denied him, and said, "We have no king but Cæsar;" yea, so thoroughly bent were they upon disavowing him, and so fearful lest it should be thought that they were in any way identified with him, that they sought to have the superscription altered which was placed above the cross. They said, "Write not the king of the Jews, but that he said, I am the king of the Jews." Their request, however, was not granted, for the governor replied, "What I have written, I have written."

It is so with sinners still. This man, this Jesus, they will not have to reign over them. He has estab-

lished a kingdom upon earth, a kingdom which consists of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; yet notwithstanding the blessedness it secures, and the glorious privileges it confers, they refuse to become its subjects. Other lords have dominion over them; and they continue to reject his claims, and set his authority at defiance.

II. THE NOBLEMAN'S RETURN.—It was after he had received the kingdom, so that he was now in a very different position from that which he had previously occupied; and having been invested with royal power and dignity, he would appear in a state of splendour becoming his exalted rank and condition. Certain it is that the Lord Jesus, when he comes the second time, will be arrayed in glorious majesty. No traces of his humiliation will then be seen; the form of a servant, the likeness of sinful flesh, the marred visage, the smitten cheek, the back ploughed with scourges, and the head pricked with thorns—all these will belong to the former things which have for ever passed away. On the clouds of heaven will he appear, and that with power and great glory. “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with all the holy angels: *and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*”

We have now to contemplate the reckoning on the one hand, and the recompense on the other, as far as three distinct classes are concerned.

1. The diligent. “And it came to pass that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant; because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five

pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities." The first servant had been remarkably successful, and there can be no doubt but that his success was owing to his great diligence. The second, though less successful, had also done well, for while the one had increased his stock ten-fold, the other gained five-fold, which was no inconsiderable profit. Neither of them, however, claim any merit to themselves, the language of each being, "*thy* pound hath gained," not our labour or fidelity. Such was the spirit of the great apostle; not more distinguished was he for his eminent gifts, his untiring zeal, his extensive usefulness, than for his deep humility. "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."

Both of these servants received their lord's approval; and not only was their diligence commended, but also rewarded. To the one was granted authority over ten cities, and to the other over five. We are here taught, as in many other passages, that the future recompense of the saints will not be the same in the case of all. There will be degrees and diversities in the honours to which they will be raised, and the blessedness they shall inherit. "Every one shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour." "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully." While it can be said to the whole body of the faithful, "Great is your reward in heaven," yet it is very evident that it will be greater with some than with others.

2. The faithless. The nobleman had ten servants, but we have an account of only three. It is to be hoped that the rest belonged to the former class, and that all were more or less faithful. One at least was not, and we have now to attend to what is stated concerning him.

(1.) What he did. "And another came, saying, 'Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin.'" He had not squandered the money, not spent it in riotous living, not appropriated it in any way to his own use. We are shown, on the contrary, that he had been very careful of it, having folded it up in a napkin, and placed it where it would remain safe until his lord's return. But that was not the purpose for which it had been committed to him; it was to be traded with, to be made a source of profit, and not simply to be preserved. He should have laid it out usefully; but instead of that he hoarded it, and spent his time, not in positive wickedness, but in indolence. Instead of being active in his master's service, he did nothing; and doing nothing was his crime. It would be well for us to remember that there are sins of omission as well as of commission; that there is leaving undone the things we ought to have done, as well as doing what we ought not to have done; and if there is any truth brought before us in the sacred volume with more than ordinary clearness, it is that the rule by which we shall be judged on the great day will have more direct reference to negative than to positive qualities.

(2.) The grounds on which he thus acted. "For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man; thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow." He regarded his lord, or pretended to regard him, as hard, severe, unreasonable; and many look upon the Most High in a similar manner. They contend that he expects from his creatures more than they have power to render, and more therefore than he has any right to demand. They view him as a cruel and rigorous task-master, not unlike Pharaoh of old, who required from the Israelites the tale of bricks without supplying them with the necessary straw. Having formed such an unworthy conception of his

character, cheerful, willing, active obedience to his commands, is out of the question. The great principle of true obedience is love, and for them to regard the divine Being with affection, after having arrayed him in attributes so repulsive, is impossible. There are those, it is true, whose sentiments and feelings are quite the reverse. With them God is not stern, vindictive, implacable, but easy, indulgent, ready to overlook what is amiss; and therefore they disregard his will, for they imagine that they can do so with impunity. In the former case there is the fear which hath torment, while in the latter there is no fear at all; and the practical results in both instances will be much the same. "I feared thee," was the language of this servant; and whatever such a feeling ought to have led to, its actual effect was to paralyze exertion, and not cause him to be up and doing.

(3.) The rebuke he received. "And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?" He is called a wicked servant, and such he truly was. He had disobeyed his master, he had neglected his interests, he had been faithless and indolent; and, above all, the language he used in seeking to justify himself, shows that he was of a thoroughly bad disposition. He thought of clearing himself by calumniating his lord; but his slanderous accusation is made the ground of his condemnation. If he knew that he had to do with one who was particularly rigid and severe, he is shown that he ought, for that very reason, to have exerted himself to the utmost. Or, if he supposed that by embarking in any commercial speculation there was danger of it proving unsuccessful, he could at least have put the

money out to interest, that it might not be altogether unproductive. But having done neither the one nor the other, he stands self-condemned, for he had now nothing to say ; his mouth was stopped, as will be the case with all who have resembled him, at the last day. Then God will most assuredly be justified when he speaketh, and be clear when he judgeth.

(4.) The punishment with which he was visited. “ And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given ; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.” He richly deserved to be thus treated for his faithlessness and neglect. He had proved a worthless, a truly unprofitable servant, and so his pound is taken from him, and handed over to another. His lord did not say, Return it to me—for he did not need it ; but give it to him that hath ten pounds. And when the spectators expressed their astonishment, the principle was stated on which the transfer was made. It is a principle of universal application, which it would be well for us seriously to ponder. All who fail to improve their advantages will, sooner or later, be deprived of them ; while those who make a profitable use of what they have received, shall be esteemed worthy of richer favours, and be promoted to higher trusts.

3. The rebellious. “ But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.” The attitude which this class had assumed was that of direct opposition ; by them all the claims of their sovereign were set at nought, and his authority publicly rejected. They were not false friends, not faithless servants, but open and determined foes. They were thus guilty of high treason, and the extreme penalty of the law was inflicted on

them. Here the enemies of Christ, those who set themselves against the Lord and against his anointed, may read their solemn doom. These traitors were slain, and slain before him whom they had rejected; and what does the apostle say? "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction *from the presence of the Lord*, and from the glory of his power." Let those, then, whose language has been hitherto, "We will not have this man to reign over us," be persuaded to submit to his sceptre, and humble themselves at his feet. He is a great King, and it will be terrible indeed to incur his displeasure; but he waiteth to be gracious to all who are willing to lay down their arms, and acknowledge him as their Prince and Saviour. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little: blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

THE STRONG MAN ARMED.

WHEN A STRONG MAN ARMED KEEPETH HIS PALACE, HIS GOODS ARE IN PEACE. BUT WHEN A STRONGER THAN HE SHALL COME UPON HIM, AND OVERCOME HIM, HE TAKETH FROM HIM ALL HIS ARMOUR WHEREIN HE TRUSTED, AND DIVIDETH HIS SPOILS.—
Luke xi. 21, 22.

WE have here—

I. A STRIKING REPRESENTATION OF SINNERS IN THEIR NATURAL CONDITION.—“When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace.”

1. The citadel. It is the heart of man. Once the dwelling place of God, it has now become the habitation of the Evil One. In the book of Revelation the phrase is used, “where Satan’s seat is:” and whatever be its literal reference, it may be applied to the soul of every unconverted sinner.

2. Its defence. The palace is kept and guarded with no ordinary care, for the great enemy is most anxious to maintain possession of his wretched vassals. For this purpose he blinds their eyes, lest the light of the glorious gospel, which he so much hates and dreads, should shine into them.

3. The supposed security realized. While under Satanic influence, the children of men flatter themselves that all is well: they say, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace.” As regards almost every commodity, there is what is counterfeit and what is genuine: and nothing is more evident than that there is a false as well as a true peace.

II. A VIEW OF THE WONDERFUL DELIVERANCE EXPERIENCED WHEN MEN BECOME THE SUBJECTS OF SAVING GRACE.

1. The character of the deliverer. Satan is strong,

but Jesus is "stronger than he." He is more than a match for the powerful adversary, and all his confederate legions.

2. The assault he makes upon the enemy. He comes upon him, and overcomes him. There may be stubborn resistance, for it is not without a hard struggle that the exasperated foe will yield ; but it is all in vain. The strongholds are broken down ; while it is said to the prisoners, "Go forth ; and to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves."

3. The conquest obtained is not only decisive, but complete. "He taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." Thus the abilities, wealth, influence, which had been employed in the cause of the devil, are now turned against him ; and henceforth the single aim and object of every rescued one will be, to spread the honours of the Saviour's name, and promote the interests of his kingdom.

THE PHARISEE AND PUBLICAN.

AND HE SPAKE THIS PARABLE UNTO CERTAIN WHICH TRUSTED IN THEMSELVES THAT THEY WERE RIGHTEOUS, AND DESPISED OTHERS. TWO MEN WENT UP INTO THE TEMPLE TO PRAY; THE ONE A PHARISEE AND THE OTHER A PUBLICAN. THE PHARISEE STOOD AND PRAYED THUS WITH HIMSELF, GOD, I THANK THEE THAT I AM NOT AS OTHER MEN ARE, &c.—Luke xviii. 9-14.

THE various characters described in the sacred scriptures, whether real or parabolic, are set forth with a two-fold design. It is in order that we may copy their excellencies, or guard against their defects. On the one hand they are patterns for our imitation, and on the other they are beacons for our warning. In the former case the motto placed at the commencement of the narrative, or the moral inserted at its close, is—"Go thou, and do likewise;" in the latter case, "Go thou, and do *otherwise*."

Of this we have a memorable instance in the present parable. The spirit embodied in the one character we should devoutly seek, and it becomes us as carefully and constantly to shun that which is exhibited in the other. Let us then look at both pictures, drawn as they were by His master-hand, who knew what was *in* man, as well as all his outward surroundings. But before we do so, we shall notice—

I. THE STATEMENT WITH WHICH THE PARABLE IS INTRODUCED.—"And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Who were these? Not the Pharisees, according to Stier and other writers; and the reason they adduce in support of this opinion is, that the figure of a Pharisee would not have been held up to them as a similitude. From this we are disposed

to differ, not being able to see much force in such an objection. With equal plausibility it might be urged, that in the parable of the good Samaritan, the priest and Levite were not Jews, inasmuch as its design was to reprove a Jewish lawyer. If the words do not refer to the Pharisees, we may well ask, to whom do they refer? Certainly not to the disciples; for although they were not altogether free from the spirit which is denounced, any more than the most advanced believer in the present day; yet it cannot be said that this was their leading characteristic, which was the case with those to whom the parable was addressed. Besides, it is not the mere figure of a Pharisee that is held up; it is rather in the contrast exhibited that the point of the representation lies.

This verse speaks of two things concerning the persons intended, both of which apply with the strictest propriety to the Pharisees, although not to them exclusively.

1. The feelings with which they regarded themselves. Not merely had they an unhesitating conviction that they were righteous persons, but it was upon their own righteousness that they relied for acceptance and eternal life. It is not said that they were persuaded of themselves that they were righteous, but they trusted in themselves—that is, in their own deeds and deservings as the sole ground of their hope, and the procuring cause of their salvation. In the language of the apostle, “they were ignorant of God’s righteousness, and went about to establish their own righteousness, not submitting themselves unto the righteousness of God.”

It is not such as possess in the largest measure those personal excellencies, and who abound most in those noble acts, which excite our admiration, that trust in their own merits, but quite the reverse. Take Howard, the great philanthropist, as an example. The description given of him by Burke is well known, but it is so

striking, that it is worthy of being repeated. "He visited all Europe,—not to survey the sumptuousness of palaces, or the stateliness of temples; not to make accurate measurements of the remains of ancient grandeur, nor to form a scale of the curiosity of modern art; not to collect medals, or collate manuscripts:—but to dive into the depths of dungeons; to plunge into the infection of hospitals; to survey the mansions of sorrow and pain; to take the guage and dimensions of misery, depression, and contempt; to remember the forgotten, to attend to the neglected, to visit the forsaken, and compare and collate the distresses of all men, in all countries." And yet this man, after so splendid a career, after a whole life devoted to the one object of doing good, renounced all dependence upon himself, and felt that he was nothing but an unprofitable servant. On his tombstone was placed, at his own request, this inscription, "Christ my hope:" and in his last will and testament he thus wrote: "My immortal spirit I cast on the sovereign mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of my strength, and, I trust, is become my salvation."

2. The feelings with which they regarded their fellow creatures. It is sure to be the case that those who have the greatest confidence in their own supposed excellencies, will be found despising others. Their language will be, "Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou." But of one thing we may be fully assured, that such a spirit is altogether ungodlike, and altogether unchristlike. "Behold, God is mighty, and *despiseth not any.*" And his only begotten Son, when he tabernacled here below, in this, as in all other respects, was his express image. He despised not any on account of their poverty, for he was poor himself. On a memorable occasion, when he appeared in the midst of his disciples, it is said, "And he shewed unto them his hands:" but with no diamond rings did

they glitter; they rather bore indications of the manual toil to which he had been subject; they might have been still rough from the use of the hammer and the saw. We often speak of the lower orders, and of the common people; but he who was brought up in the workshop of the carpenter, and who made himself known as the Son of man, employed no such terms, and never indulged in such invidious comparisons. He despised not any on account of their ignorance. "This people, who knoweth not the law, are cursed." By the proud Pharisees the illiterate masses were thus regarded as cut off from the favour of God, and doomed to inevitable destruction. But the Lord Jesus, far from treating them with contempt, espoused their cause, and became their friend and teacher. Neither did he despise any on account of their sinfulness. Although separate from sinners, yet he mingled with the vilest, to the sore annoyance of the pompous religionists by whom he was surrounded. "Even in the poor prostitute," it has been said, "he recognised one of Eve's daughters." But we hasten from these introductory observations to notice—

II. THE STRIKING CONTRAST WHICH IS HERE PRESENTED.—"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican." These two characters were in every respect, "wide as the poles asunder." The one belonged to the highest and most respectable, the other to the lowest class in Jewish society. The designation of the one was at once suggestive of saintly worth, of all that was orthodox in sentiment, regular in the performance of religious duties, and blameless in outward demeanour; while that of the other was inseparably identified with impiety, injustice, oppression, disloyalty, and whatever was debasing and abominable. But our attention is first directed to—

1. The Pharisee. "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as

other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." We have here two things set forth.

(1.) The adjuncts of his prayer. These relate to his attitude, and the isolated position he occupied. As to the former it is said that "he stood." Various bodily postures are referred to by the sacred writers in connection with this act of worship. Daniel *kneeled* upon his knees three times a day and prayed: and Paul, when taking leave of the Ephesian elders, kneeled down and prayed with them all. In one of his epistles he says, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." On the other hand we read of David, that "he went in and *sat* before the Lord, saying, Who am I, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?" But standing was by no means unusual, and therefore the Pharisee is not to be blamed for assuming such an attitude. Indeed the publican stood also, so that in this respect both were alike.

But "the Pharisee stood, and prayed thus with himself." This seems to imply that his prayer was secret, but it is not probable that such was the case. The words "with himself" properly belong to the word "stood," and not to the word "prayed." "The Pharisee stood by himself, and prayed thus." He kept aloof from others, lest they should pollute him. He appears to have gone to some prominent place, as near the holy of holies as he could, that all the people might see how eminently devout a man he was.

(2.) The substance of his prayer. He commenced by giving God thanks, and of course that was highly proper; but it is quite possible for us to thank God with our lips, and to thank ourselves with our hearts; and there is every reason to conclude that so it was in this case. Had he really thanked God for what he was, he could not have gloried over others, but would have heard

the voice which says, "Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou hast not received?"

In this prayer, if prayer it may be called, the most prominent object is the Pharisee himself. "Him first, him last, him midst, and without end." How that pompous monosyllable *I* appears again and again! *I* thank thee, *I* am not as other men, *I* fast, *I* give tithes. Here there is nothing but self-consequence, self-eulogy, self-esteem. "One of the first effects of the gospel," it has been well said, "is to sink self; and if ever *I* comes in, it is in the beautiful form in which the apostle uses it: 'by the grace of God, I am what I am.' 'I laboured more abundantly than they all'—here Paul was beginning as a Pharisee, the old nature struggling for supremacy; but he instantly checked himself, and crushed it, adding—'yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.'"

The grounds of the peculiar complacency with which this man regarded himself were two-fold. One was freedom from outward transgressions. He was not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers. As if he had said, I seize no man's property through false pretences; I take advantage of no man's ignorance in buying or selling; and I avoid all kinds of impurity and licentiousness. But with this negative view he connects something positive, namely, the regular observance of certain religious duties. "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess," or all that I acquire. Such were the virtues of which he boasted, the merits on which he relied. These he thought amply sufficient to recommend him to the favour of God, and regarded them as a sure passport to the heavenly Paradise. But let us turn from the Pharisee to—

2. The publican. Clothed in the garb of his own righteousness, from head to foot, full of consequence and full of pride, the Pharisee had nothing to speak of but his own good qualities; he regarded himself

as the envy of his sect, and a distinguished ornament of his nation. But, how different was it with the poor publican! View the humble penitent as he is here exhibited. Although despised by the proud formalist of whom we have been speaking, and although he was nothing, and less than nothing, in his own esteem; yet he was an object that attracted the admiration of angels; the sight he presented was one that thrilled principalities and powers; it made the morning stars sing together, and all the sons of God to shout aloud for joy. "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." In this verse, so simple, so graphic, so impressive, there are several particulars referred to, among which we may mention—

(1.) His unobtrusiveness. The Pharisee went forward to the most conspicuous place he could find, but the publican "stood afar off." He was well aware that his past life had been one of great distance from God, and now it seemed as if he dared not draw near him. Had he ever known the words of the Psalmist, with what force would they have darted into his mind: "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, *and causest to approach unto thee*, that he may dwell in thy courts;" but he, alas! felt himself altogether unworthy of such a favour. His humility was so deep that he regarded himself as unworthy to occupy the most obscure and remote corner within that hallowed place.

(2.) His consciousness of guilt. Not merely did he stand afar off, but his countenance was down; he "would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven." He could truly say, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up." Sometimes, perhaps, he would attempt to raise his down-cast eyes; but his instant thought would be, If I do look up, what shall I

there behold? There is nothing but infinite purity there; and how can I, a creature so vile and polluted, gaze upward towards his holy habitation, who charges even his angels with folly, and in whose sight the very heavens are not clean? And we should feel as he felt if we only knew how filthy and abominable we are, and had a realizing impression of the immaculate sanctity of him with whom we have to do. Oh, if angels veil their faces with their wings, as unable or unfit to look upon God; and if the ancient prophet, one of the holiest of that goodly fellowship, cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts;" how much more ought we to shrink and shudder, who are altogether as an unclean thing! Well may we be covered with shame and confusion, as every convinced sinner is sure to be covered, his language being, with Ezra of old, "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee."

(3.) His deep anguish. In the expression he "smote upon his breast," many things are included. He did so to intimate, that there the heavy burden lay, which pressed him down to the dust. He did so to show that this was the sore place, the seat of the awful malady with which he was infected, festering his very vitals, and spreading its venom through his whole frame. He did so to evince that it was the storehouse from which all the evil treasures had been brought forth; the poisonous fountain whence the streams of pollution had flowed; the heaving volcano which had been casting out its infernal lava in fearful abundance. He well knew that the sinfulness of his life was a clear indication of the deep corruption of his heart, and was thus fully prepared to admit the humbling truth, that it is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. He therefore smote it, struck it hard, as the word implies, as if determined to avenge the innumerable insults which God had there received. But his mental agony is,

doubtless, what is mainly intended. His sorrow for sin was great; he was overwhelmed with grief at the remembrance of his numberless transgressions.

(4.) His earnest cry. It was a short prayer that he offered—only seven words. And it was as simple as it was short. It contained no high flowing expressions, and no vain repetitions. It expressed no confidence in his own merits; there was no boasting that he was not as other men; there were no pleas drawn from the fasts he had kept, and from the tithes he had given. But, conscious of his utter unworthiness, he casts himself at the divine footstool, while, with heavy sobs and sighs, he gives vent to the feelings of his inmost soul, by crying, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.”

In the manner in which he spoke of himself there is something exceedingly touching. “Me, a sinner,”—a sinner vile, polluted, hell-deserving. “Me, a sinner,”—destitute of soundness from the crown of my head to the soles of my feet, full of wounds and bruises and putrifying sores. “Me, a sinner,”—having lifted up my puny arms in wilful and unblushing rebellion against Him, in whom I live, and move, and have my being; trampled, times without number, upon his holy law; and most justly incurred his everlasting displeasure. Thus his language was that of confession, and it was a confession remarkably pointed and personal. There are many who content themselves with some vague and general acknowledgment. Their language is, we are all sinners; and it is a thought that seems to give them considerable relief, and even satisfaction; as if they could lighten their own burden by dividing it among mankind at large. It was not so with the publican; he takes it all to himself; he thinks of no one else; all are completely lost sight of but one, and that one, “*me*, a sinner.”

But in his prayer there was earnest supplication, as well as humble confession. “God be merciful”—or

rather, be propitious,—“to me, a sinner.” It cannot be supposed that he possessed very clear views of the divinely appointed medium through which pardoning mercy is extended to the guilty; but that he was not entirely ignorant of it is evident from the term employed. With the offerings for sin which were bleeding upon the altar he must have been familiar in some measure; and also with the expectation entertained concerning the promised advent of him who was to be Israel’s strength and consolation. He seemed therefore to say, Let atonement be made for me; I am a sinner, and cannot be saved in any other way. Have mercy upon me through sacrifice, and thus cover and cancel all my sins.

There are not a few who build their hopes of heaven upon the mere mercy of God, altogether irrespective of Christ as the appointed mediator. With the general acknowledgment that they and all mankind are sinners, they connect the truth that God is merciful; and this removes all uneasiness from their minds, and allays every gloomy foreboding. We believe the blessed assurance that “our God is merciful;” but we also believe that the mercy of which many fondly dream is only another name for weakness, and to him that cannot possibly belong. We should ever remember that “a God all mercy is a God unjust,” and such most assuredly is not his character with whom we have to do. When did he appear a God all mercy? Not at the fall; for the solemn threatening he then pronounced was carried into execution, and death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. Not at the flood; for then a whole generation were buried for their crimes in a watery grave. Not at the destruction of the cities of the plain; for he rained on them fire, and brimstone, and a horrible tempest, as the awful portion of their cup. Not at the giving of the law; for such were the displays of his awful majesty and supreme authority, that the people cried, “Let Moses speak with us, and we will hear; but

let not God speak with us lest we die." Not at the destruction of Jerusalem; for then vengeance came upon the guilty tribes to the uttermost; the blood they had so impiously invoked was poured upon them and their children; and those who had long been the special favourites of heaven have wandered ever since, as exiles and outcasts, without a country or a home. It would be well therefore for such as make the mere mercy of God their refuge to bear these solemn occurrences in mind; if they do so they cannot fail to perceive that he will not be found too easy, too indulgent and kind-hearted, to punish those who persist in their rebellion against him.

But in Christ divine mercy and divine justice meet in sweetest harmony together. In him God is glorious in holiness, but he is no less glorious in compassion and in grace. There he is a just God, and yet a saviour; he is just, while at the same time he is the justifier of all those who believe in Jesus. And in his name, who is the great high Priest of our profession, the most unworthy can approach his sacred footstool with humble boldness, that they might obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need.

III. THE PRACTICAL LESSON ENFORCED.—"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The proud Pharisee departed unblessed, unsaved; rich in his own imagined excellencies, he was sent empty away. But the humble penitent returned home in the enjoyment of his favour, which is life, and his loving-kindness which is better than life. His prayer was heard, his person was accepted, his sins, which were many, were all forgiven. To him it might be now said, in the words addressed to the recovered demoniac, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."

As to the important statement with which the parable closes, a statement perhaps more frequently repeated by the Saviour than any other, it becomes us all to lay it seriously to heart. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. And while pride in every form should be shunned by us, we should especially guard against spiritual pride, as the most hateful and abominable of all. We must feel that in ourselves we are nothing, and that our best righteousness is as filthy rags. Renouncing all merit of our own, we are to cast our guilty souls upon him who is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. Then will be brought to pass the words that are written, "*They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance; in thy name shall they rejoice all the day; and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.*" Exalted here from a state of enmity and condemnation, to a state of acceptance and justification; exalted hereafter to a condition, the blessedness of which surpasses our loftiest conceptions. Truly amazing are the statements employed to set forth what will be done unto those whom the Eternal King delighteth to honour. "Equal unto the angels;" "kings and priests unto God;" "joint-heirs with Christ;" yea, co-partners with him in his regal dignities, for "to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

And while such is the honour with which humility will be crowned hereafter, none are at present so secure as those in whom this grace abounds. In the homely strains of John Bunyan, it may be truly said—

"He that is down need fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide."

LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. A CITY THAT IS SET ON AN HILL CANNOT BE HID. NEITHER DO MEN LIGHT A CANDLE, AND PUT IT UNDER A BUSHEL, BUT ON A CANDLESTICK; AND IT GIVETH LIGHT UNTO ALL THAT ARE IN THE HOUSE. LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE BEFORE MEN, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS, AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN.—Mat. v. 14-16.

OUR Lord's sermon on the Mount is distinguished by many striking features:—

1. The authority by which it is pervaded. It was this that particularly struck those who heard it, as we find from what is stated at its close.

2. Its sentiments are of a peculiarly elevated character, and altogether opposed to the spirit and maxims of the world.

3. It is throughout eminently practical. One writer observes, "So strongly are certain characters prejudiced against all views of religion which are not highly doctrinal, that were Christ to reappear on the earth as a stranger, and to preach another sermon like that on the Mount, they would pronounce him a legalist and Arminian." In considering the words before us we notice—

- I. THE IMPORTANT TRUTH WHICH IS HERE ANNOUNCED.—"Ye are the light of the world." This intimates—

1. The resemblance that exists between the Lord Jesus and all true followers. He said concerning himself, "I am the light of the world." He was so in a special and pre-eminent manner, for he shone with a radiance all his own. He is the sun of the spiritual firmament: but while he is the great, essential, and exclusive source of all illumination, his people are

intended to be reflectors of himself, and to shine, like the moon, with borrowed splendour.

2. That all true believers are blessed in order to be made a blessing. In the former verses their personal blessedness, as the meek, the poor in spirit, the pure in heart, is declared. Here they are set forth in relation to the world which lieth in wickedness. They are to be bright luminaries, scattering the thick gloom in which the moral atmosphere is enveloped, and thus become true benefactors to their species, even should they be reviled and persecuted in consequence.

II. THE FAMILIAR ILLUSTRATION WHICH IS HERE GIVEN.
—“A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.” In this comparison two ideas are suggested.

1. Publicity. Nothing is more conspicuous than a city erected on the side or summit of a mountain. It is seen from afar, and attracts the notice of all who pass that way. It was said concerning Christ that he could not be hid, and the same is true of all his genuine disciples. “We are made,” the apostle states, “a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.”

2. Responsibility. Many eyes are upon them, and the consideration powerfully enforces the inspired injunction, “See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.” Our adversaries, with malignant curiosity, mark every step we take, and it will be well if they are forced to acknowledge, as in the case of that eminent saint of old, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”

It is further added, “Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.” To do so would be an act of the greatest folly, a folly which no sane person would be likely to commit; but, spiritually, we are in danger of hiding our light under a bushel and of burying our talent in the earth. Hence—

III. THE SEASONABLE EXHORTATION WHICH IS HERE ADDRESSED.—“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

1. The light of your edifying conversation. A Christian's tongue, like Peter's, should betray him wherever he goes. Such, however, is far from being universally the case. The speech of many professors is not “always with grace, seasoned with salt,” to use the apostle's expression. The Saviour inquired of the two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus, “What manner of communications are these that ye have one with another?” Alas, there are not a few, it is to be feared, who would now blush to answer that question. “We will not be censorious,” to quote the words of a celebrated preacher, “but we believe that the metal of a bell is known by the sound of the clapper; whatever is in the well will be found in the bucket; what is in the warehouse will be shown in the shop; and what is in the heart will be bubbling forth at the mouth.”

2. Of your faithful and zealous exertions. A single Christian, who has a mind to work, whose soul is bent upon doing good, what a blessing may he prove to all around him! Great talents are not necessary, for it by no means follows that the most gifted are the most useful. Our constant inquiry should therefore be, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” If we are influenced by such a spirit we cannot fail to be instrumental in chasing away, to some extent at least, the moral darkness by which we are surrounded.

3. Of your holy and consistent conduct. Example has a wonderful influence. Thus Paul speaks of the Thessalonians as being ensamples to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia. When they turned from idols to serve the living and true God, the effects of the gospel appeared in them in such a signal manner, as almost to supersede the necessity of all Christian efforts. “In every

place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad ; so that we need not to speak anything."

We remark, in conclusion, that every individual, either knowingly or unknowingly, directly or indirectly, is a light to others. And the question is a very solemn one, **Am I a light to instruct and bless, or a light to mislead and destroy?** The words we speak, the efforts we put forth, the manner of life we live, cannot fail to have the one effect or the other.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

THERE WAS A CERTAIN RICH MAN, WHICH WAS CLOTHED IN PURPLE AND FINE LINEN, AND FARED SUMPTUOUSLY EVERY DAY: AND THERE WAS A CERTAIN BEGGAR NAMED LAZARUS, WHICH WAS LAID AT HIS GATE, FULL OF SORES, AND DESIRING TO BE FED WITH THE CRUMBS WHICH FELL FROM THE RICH MAN'S TABLE: MOREOVER THE DOGS CAME AND LICKED HIS SORES. AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT THE BEGGAR DIED, AND WAS CARRIED BY THE ANGELS INTO ABRAHAM'S BOSOM: THE RICH MAN ALSO DIED, AND WAS BURIED; AND IN HELL HE LIFTED UP HIS EYES BEING IN TORMENTS, &c.—Luke xvi. 19-31.

In this important and most solemn parable, three things are more especially set before us. We are furnished, in the first place, with a striking view of—

I. THE EXTREMES OF EARTHLY CONDITION.—A greater contrast cannot be conceived than that which we have now to consider. Let us then attend to what our Lord states concerning one who may be regarded as the embodiment of—

1. Princely wealth. “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.” His name is not given, though he is often called Dives, from the Latin word for a rich man. Instead of stating who he was, which would have served no practical purpose, the Saviour speaks of him in general terms, and merely refers to the worldly position he occupied, and the manner of life that he led.

We need not say that the possession of riches is no crime, just as poverty is no virtue. It is the order of providence that there should be some rich and many poor, and that the expenditure of the one class should employ and support the other. Such is the natural course of things; and we might as well endeavour to

reduce the mountains of the globe, and make the earth one extended plain, as attempt to place all classes of the community on the same level.

It was not therefore because this person was rich that he is marked out as an heir of perdition. It is true that large possessions are a hindrance rather than a help to a life of godliness ; but that they are not incompatible with true piety is evident from numerous instances in which both were conjoined. In the time of Christ it was so, although the bulk of his followers, like himself, were poor. Zaccheus was rich. Joseph of Arimathea was an honourable counsellor. Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews. A nobleman in Capernaum believed with all his house. Under the Old Testament this was the case far more prominently. Abraham, Job, David, and many others, were at once rich in earthly substance and those treasures which never fade away. It is so, happily, in the present day. There are those of highest rank and largest fortunes among the disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus, who adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things. There is indeed reason to believe, that there are now a larger number, than in any previous age, of the rich of this world who are poor in spirit, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him.

Neither was there necessarily anything culpable in the other particulars stated concerning this individual, namely, that "he was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day." It cannot be said that it is improper for persons of ample means and lofty position in society, to live in a style corresponding with the circumstances in which they are placed. Wherein then did his guilt lie? In his gluttony and drunkenness, or any other carnal excesses? None of these are laid to his charge. From anything that appears to the contrary, he was free from all impurity and licentiousness, all injustice and extortion, yea, all inhumanity and hard-

heartedness ; for it is by no means certain, that what was desired by the poor beggar at his gate was refused, as is often supposed. The head and front of his offending was evidently that he sought his happiness in the things of the present world ; the life he lived in the flesh was spent in slothful ease, and luxurious gratification ; he had his portion here, enjoyed it while he could, but cared for, and inquired after, no other.

2. Abject poverty. “ And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.” This is a picture of no common misery. A beggar under any circumstance is a pitiable object ; but in the present case there was no ordinary combination of distressing circumstances. His poverty was extreme, which in itself is a sore calamity ; here, however, it was united with a loathsome distemper. The body that had often felt the pangs of hunger was covered over with ulcers, and being exposed through the few rags which served for a garment, made it a sickening sight. In addition to this, the poor creature was altogether helpless, his limbs, it seems, being so paralysed that he had no power to move them. He had therefore to be laid at the rich man’s gate, where he was obliged to remain until he was removed away.

Oh what a contrast was there between these two persons ! In the owner of that lordly mansion we behold a man possessed of all earthly good ; in the beggar at his gate we see one in a condition of the utmost penury and destitution. Here magnificence and wretchedness are placed in close proximity to each other. On the one side robes of purple and fine linen ; on the other rags and tatters. On the one side the most sumptuous entertainments, every delicacy that earth, or air, or seas could supply being furnished in ample abundance ; on the other, nothing was looked for but a few broken

crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. And yet who can hesitate for a moment in deciding which of the two was the truly enviable character? Surely none, when they are viewed, as we now proceed to view them, in connection with—

II. THE OPPOSITE STATES OF FUTURE RETRIBUTION.—Concerning Lazarus we notice—

1. His welcome release. "And it came to pass, that the beggar died." How or where, we are not told. Perhaps it was at the rich man's gate, with no one to close his eyes, or catch his parting breath; perhaps in some wretched hovel on a bed of straw, as cheerless, and it may be far more so, than the kennels in which were accommodated the friendly creatures that had licked his sores. But this mattered little; the summons was doubtless welcomed by him, whatever the circumstances under which it came. To him the world had no attractions, and he could not fail to long, and that with an ardent longing, for the period when he should have done with all its discomforts and vexations. As Job asks, "Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; which long for death, but it cometh not; which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?" But with the beggar, the event so long wished for, at length arrived; and he found not the grave alone, but something inconceivably better.

2. The high honour conferred upon him. No earthly friend, as we have stated, may have been present at the time of his departure; but though alone, yet he was not alone, for his dying couch was surrounded by angelic legions. A multitude of the heavenly hosts were there, who had come as a special convoy to take charge of his emancipated spirit, and conduct it safely to its celestial home. With their precious deposit they mount the airy road, flying with inconceivable velocity through the upper regions, leaving suns and constellations behind them. Ere long they reach their destination, even the

heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the great King. There they cry, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, that an heir of glory may enter in." The portals open at the sound; the everlasting doors fly back; and he, who had been so poor, so afflicted, so despised on earth, receives a cordial welcome into heaven.

3. The pre-eminent blessedness he enjoyed. Simply to gain admittance there, to occupy the lowest place, even to be a door-keeper in that house not made with hands, must be regarded as a privilege beyond the power of words to express. But the station assigned to Lazarus was of no ordinary kind. It seems indeed to be one of the special objects of the divine Being to reverse the decisions of this world, and confer the highest honours upon those who have been most lightly esteemed, and impart the richest consolations to such as have been most sorely afflicted. It is his peculiar delight to "raise up the poor out of the dust, and lift up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, even among the princes of his people." And where can we find a more striking instance of this than in the case before us? The father of the faithful is certainly a prince of no common rank among those who have been made kings and priests unto God; and it is the nearest position to him that is assigned to this humble saint. As is well known, the view entertained by the Jews of future blessedness was that of a feast, where Abraham was reclining at the head of the table; and thus to repose in his bosom was to be placed exceedingly high in the happy company. Oh, what a change was here! That he who only craved a few crumbs from the rich man's entertainments, should not merely be allowed to sit at the heavenly banquet, but be stationed at the upper end of that board of ineffable bliss!

We may observe, in passing, that we have, in this part of the subject, a clear proof of the immediate blessedness

of the righteous on their dismissal from this world of sin and sorrow. There is here no countenance given to the cheerless dogma that the soul continues in a state of unconsciousness during the interval between death and the resurrection. "And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." If words have any meaning this verse shows that he was conveyed to a state of happiness at once. Should it be objected that the whole is a mere parable, we say, in reply, that even a parabolic representation must agree with the thing signified, in order to its being a reliable source, or a proper channel of instruction. Parables were surely designed to teach truths, not falsehoods; but if the soul-sleeping system be true, this parable plainly teaches what is erroneous. Besides, it could have been easily constructed on that system as well as on the opposite. Our thoughts might have been directed to the general resurrection, and there be led to see how all the scenes of the present state will be reversed and rectified. That, it is true, is often done: but here, as well as in many other passages in which the parabolic element is altogether excluded, we are shown what will transpire immediately subsequent to the stroke of death. It was in no parable that our Lord spake when he assured the dying thief, "Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Not in a parable did Paul declare, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." And again, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." After the resurrection the soul will be no longer absent from the body, and thus the phrase "present with the Lord," must denote the immediate bliss of believers. It is something coincident, not with the apostle's return to the body, but his leaving it; with the dissolution, not with the restoration of the union.

But we must turn to contemplate the other character. "The rich man also died, and was buried." Wealth, it is useless to deny, has great power. It commands the comforts and luxuries of life; it purchases nearly every social distinction; it gains access to the most exclusive circles; heads are uncovered as its possessor passes through the streets.

"Look abroad—

Doth it not give honour to the worthless,
Strength to the weak, beauty to wither'd age,
And wisdom to the fool? As the world runs,
A devil with a purse wins more regard
Than angels empty-handed."

Yes, wealth is power; but, at the same time, it is necessary for us to bear in mind that its power has limits. It will not silence an accusing conscience; it will not pay a single debt at the bar of heaven; and, most assuredly, it cannot bribe the king of terrors, or keep the last enemy away. Riches profit not in the day of wrath, nor are they of the least avail in averting the hour of dissolution.

While wealth, however, as this rich man found, cannot secure exemption from the irreversible sentence which has been pronounced upon all flesh, nor cause its execution to be deferred for a single day; yet there is nothing that is more likely to lead men to cling to life, and induce them to regard the closing scene with reluctance and dismay. It is recorded of Dr. Johnson that, while walking on one occasion with Garrick, and surveying the splendid mansion and beautiful grounds of his friend, he exclaimed in his emphatic and familiar manner, "Ah! Davy, these are the things that make a man unwilling to die." Such is doubtless the case, and that eminent sage knew it full well, not only from the knowledge he had of his own heart, but from what he had seen in the fashionable circles with which he mingled. Those fair domains, those extensive

avenues, those shady groves and flowery gardens, those glittering chariots and pompous equipages, those elegant apartments, adorned with all that can gratify the most fastidious taste, and furnished with a view to the utmost comfort: they are the things that make a man unwilling to die. The thought of leaving them all; the thought of inexorable death coming to take him hence from so much that is pleasant and enchanting; it is a thought, whenever it is entertained, which causes him to shrink and shudder.

So it was, without doubt, in the case of him who is set before us in this parable. But, however unwilling, he had to go the way of all the earth. Of his last moments nothing is recorded. While verging on the confines of the eternal world, he might have been filled with indescribable alarm, or his spiritual insensibility may have continued undisturbed in the midst of his mortal agonies. It has been said, that "men may live fools, but fools they cannot die." Now this is far from being universally true. In all ages it has been found of some of the worst characters, as the Psalmist declares, "They have no bands in their death, neither are they plagued like other men." There is the calmness of ignorance, of indifference, of hardness of heart; a calmness which is often mistaken for that sweet serenity which the peace of God can alone impart.

But while nothing is said of the feelings with which he encountered death, we are informed of what followed it, and that both as regards here and hereafter. In reference to the former it is stated, "*the rich man also died, and was buried.*" Of the burial of Lazarus there is no mention; but here we may suppose there was a grand funeral, conducted with all the pomp and circumstance which became the high rank of the departed. Through the gate at which the poor beggar was wont to sit, a stately procession passes slowly along, while hired mourners fill the air with doleful lamentations. Thus

conveyed to the sepulchre of his fathers, over his mortal remains solemn anthems are sung, and eloquent eulogiums are pronounced upon his character. Public honours are decreed to his memory, and a splendid monument is erected to perpetuate his name to the latest posterity.

But we must now pass on and contemplate another and far different scene. Beyond his death and burial it would have been daring presumption for us to attempt to proceed, had not the great Teacher lifted up the curtain, and disclosed to our view the secrets of the invisible world. And what a disclosure, how astounding, how terrible, is here made! "And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted and thou art tormented. And beside all this between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence." In these solemn words several particulars are set forth.

1. His misery was extreme, not the slightest alleviation being afforded him. No small amount of suffering is there in the present world. The heritage of many is truly a heritage of woe. But of no poor creature on earth can it be said that it is all wretchedness with him.

"What might be worse has in't
However small, some grains of happiness :
And man ne'er drank a cup of earthly sort
That might not hold another drop of gall ;
Or in his deepest sorrow, laid his head
Upon a pillow, set so close with thorns
That might not hold another prickle still."

Here the cloudiest day is not without faint gleams of sunshine, and some solitary star is seen to cheer the darkest night. Bitter streams, like those of Marah of old, there are in abundance, but not without something to sweeten them ; and bitter herbs, such as the Jews ate at the passover, but not without more palatable food to partake of with them. There are thorns and briars in our path, but occasionally we meet with a few fragrant flowers. Such is the character of the life that now is ; there is in it an intermixture of joy and sorrow. But the state on which the rich man had entered is one to which this feature does not appertain. His misery was unmingled ; his torment could not, even for a single moment, be relieved. Small indeed was the favour he implored ; it was only,—“Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am tormented in this flame.” But even this mitigation, so slight and momentary, was denied.

2. His sufferings were enhanced by the recollection of the abundance he once possessed, and the pleasures he once enjoyed. We read that Charles the First at his execution, being requested to be short in his address from the scaffold, remarked, that he would say but one word, and that word was, “Remember !” This is what Abraham called on the rich man to do ; he said to him, not in a tone of stern and withering rebuke, but of tender compassion, “Son, remember.” But though there was nothing harsh or indignant in the exhortation, yet no words could be more cutting ; they must have stung him as with the sting of a scorpion, and have entered like a poisonous arrow into his soul. In the word “remember” is contained one of the main elements of future misery ; more than half their torture would at once cease, if the lost could only have their memory expunged, and all their past history obliterated. But it cannot be. Far from being destroyed, we have reason

to conclude that this faculty, like all the other powers of the mind, will be much more vigorous in the other world than it is at present. With a freshness of which we can now form but a faint conception, they will call to remembrance all the sins they had committed, the many mercies they had abused, the precious opportunities they had wasted, the solemn vows they had broken, and, in the case of many, the awakening convictions they had stifled and subdued.

But it was more especially to his former prosperity that the rich man's attention was now directed. And oh! to recall what he once enjoyed, and contrast his past condition with his present sufferings, what bitter agony would such a retrospection inflict! To remember how he had fared sumptuously every day, and now to be the subject of eternal want! To remember how he had drank the choicest wines, and now to call for a drop of water to cool his tongue, but call in vain! To remember how he had reposed on beds of softest down, and now to be tossing in burning flames! To remember how he had been waited upon by obsequious servants, and flattered by troops of admiring friends, and now to be taunted by accursed demons, and all the other infernal hosts, who shout with triumphant malignity, "Art thou also become like unto us? Art thou, the great one, become weak and wretched as we?"

3. As the climax of his woe, he is reminded that his state is irremediable and unchanging. Between him and the regions of bliss, there was "a great gulf fixed;" a gulf so deep that it can never be filled up; a gulf so wide that to attempt to cross it will be utterly hopeless; a gulf over which no arch can ever be built; a gulf through which no tunnel can ever be bored; a gulf which, in spite of all the power and ingenuity of men and devils, will continue impassable for ever and ever.

There are persons who contend that the world of woe will eventually be emptied of its miserable inhabitants,

and that the whole of its guilty and polluted myriads will be transferred to heaven. How diametrically opposed to such an opinion is the truth we are here taught ; and how entirely at variance with it are all the teachings of the inspired volume ! “ It had been good for that man,” said Christ concerning the traitor, “ that he had never been born.” Now, according to the doctrine of universal restitution, such a thing could not be said of any human being. If the wretched individual who betrayed the Saviour is to appear at length among the glorified, there would, even were his punishment to endure for millions of ages, be still an unending eternity of blessedness awaiting him ; and no sufferings, however terrible in their nature or protracted in their duration, would be worthy to be compared with the glory which yet remained to be realized. Good were it for that man that he had been born, though he were a traitorous Judas, or a bloody Cain, or a cruel Nero, or a scoffing Voltaire, if on any conditions he is brought at last to the enjoyment of everlasting felicity.

Strange indeed it sounds to hear hell spoken of as the way to heaven. But for those whose only appeal is to the law and to the testimony, and who receive with devout submission all that is there revealed, to believe that there is such a way, is altogether impossible. Wonderful transformations have, it is true, taken place ; but to expect that damned souls will ever become glorified saints ; to expect that their agonizing lamentations and groans will be exchanged for shouts of transporting gladness ; to expect that those tongues which had been uttering nothing but infernal blasphemies shall join with devout adoration in singing the new song ; to expect that the sulphurous fumes in which they were enveloped will be superseded by that fragrant incense which ascends before the everlasting throne ; to expect that instead of weltering in the burning lake they shall range along the banks of the river of life, and drink of its

crystal streams, and inhale its balmy breezes : such an expectation can only be indulged in by turning the truth of God into a lie, and falsifying not a few of the most decisive announcements which the lips of eternal veracity and rectitude have ever uttered. But it is time for us to hasten to the remaining portion of this solemn parable, in which we have to consider—

III. THE DIVERSIFIED METHODS OF MORAL CONVICTION. —“ Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house : for I have five brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” There are many who seem to think as this rich man thought. They suppose that such a supernatural interposition as that which he desired on behalf of his brethren, would be far more efficacious in securing spiritual results than the ordinary means which we possess. Concerning this opinion we observe—

1. That it is based upon the most palpable fallacies. The appearance of a spirit from the invisible world would, no doubt, produce great agitation and alarm ; but what of that ? Is terror conversion, or does it necessarily lead to it ? Felix trembled, yet he continued impenitent notwithstanding. On a bed of sickness, and while in, what seemed, the immediate approach of death, many a stout-hearted sinner has had his fears excited to the highest degree : but when the danger was removed, the feelings it produced speedily vanished away.

If it be said that something extraordinary is needed to arouse men from their indifference, we would ask, Who are the few favoured individuals that should be

thus dealt with? One man would think himself as much entitled to this indulgence as another. But if the thing became of frequent occurrence, its extraordinary character would be lost; ere long all such visions would be looked upon as a matter of course, and they would cease to affect in proportion as they became common.

2. It is an opinion highly insulting to the character of the divine Being. How dissatisfied are the children of men with his arrangements, and how prone are they to reproach him, if by so doing they can in any measure extenuate their own conduct. This was evidently done by the rich man. He seems to say, If I had only been sufficiently warned, if God had only given me sufficiently clear evidence of these things, I should never have been where I am. But though I was not, at any rate let my brethren be duly warned, lest my fearful doom should be theirs also.

Again, is it not dishonouring to God for us to regard his own declarations as possessing less importance, and deserving of less confidence than those of any of his creatures? If we think that such a messenger would not deceive us, we ask, Can the Most High deceive us? Is not his testimony more worthy of acceptance than all other testimonies combined? With the word of the living God, are the warnings of dead men to be compared even for a single moment?

3. The above opinion is opposed to the most indisputable facts. Persons have been raised from the dead; but what effect was produced thereby? Above all, was not Jesus restored to life, and was not his resurrection confirmed by many infallible proofs? Was he not thus declared to be the Son of God with power, in opposition to all that was alleged by those who had denounced him as a deceiver of the people? But were the Jews persuaded by that great event? Did not the bulk of them, in spite of so stupendous a miracle, continue impenitent and unbelieving?

It will surely be wisdom on our part to avail ourselves of those means of instruction and conviction with which we are already furnished, instead of indulging in vain and visionary expectations concerning other methods which we, in our perverseness and ignorance, might prefer. We do not require Lazarus to be sent to us, nor Abraham, nor Gabriel, yea, nor the Lord Jesus himself. "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? that is, to bring Christ down from above: or, Who shall descend into the deep? that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead." And why? "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach." Salvation is of grace, through faith; and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." It is not produced by seeing a spirit, either from the celestial or infernal regions, but by attending to a properly authenticated testimony; and such testimony we have in that inspired volume where life and immortality are brought to light. Let us see to it then that we hear, not only Moses and the prophets, but Christ and his apostles, as they speak to us through its sacred pages; for if we refuse to listen to them, "neither would we be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES.

AND HE SPAKE ALSO A PARABLE UNTO THEM: NO MAN PUTTETH A PIECE OF A NEW GARMENT UPON AN OLD; IF OTHERWISE, THEN BOTH THE NEW MAKETH A RENT, AND THE PIECE THAT WAS TAKEN OUT OF THE NEW AGREETH NOT WITH THE OLD. AND NO MAN PUTTETH NEW WINE INTO OLD BOTTLES, &c.—
Luke v. 36-39.

THESE words are closely connected with the preceding verses. It will be therefore necessary for us to notice—

I. THE OCCURRENCE WHICH LED TO THEIR DELIVERY.—
We have—

1. A question proposed. “And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink?” While the Saviour never sanctioned any excess in eating and drinking, yet he practised no severe austerities himself, nor did he require his followers to do so. The disciples of John, as well as those of the Pharisees, were more abstemious, being much given to fastings and other mortifications; and it is to this circumstance that the inquiry before us refers.

2. The reply given. “And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.” Feasting is a sign of gladness, but fasting is generally connected with mourning and humiliation. David, when his child was at the point of death, fasted and lay all night on the earth. So after the death of Saul, the people fasted and mourned for him. But the present condition of our Lord’s disciples was one that called, not for lamentation, but rejoicing. They had now the bridegroom with

them, and therefore it was natural for them to feel joyful. The time was coming when they would be left alone, and then they might well indulge in grief, and exhibit its usual tokens.

II. THE FAMILIAR COMPARISONS WHICH ARE HERE EMPLOYED.—“No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old ; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old.” To do this would be—

1. Inappropriate. Between a piece of old cloth and a piece of new, there is a want of correspondence ; the one does not match with the other. As unbecoming would it be for the disciples in their present circumstances to fast and mourn. It would be as much out of place as weeping at a feast, or laughter at a funeral.

2. Injurious. Not only is there no agreement between the new piece and the old, but a rent is made, and the garment is rendered worse than it was before. Now the disciples were as yet only weak in the faith, and it was possible to lay upon them more than they were able to bear. There is assuredly great danger in extreme demands upon hearts unprepared. Undue laxity should be avoided on the one hand, and undue severity on the other, especially in the case of young believers.

This is further shown by the other similitude. “And no man putteth new wine into old bottles ; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles ; and both are preserved.” Old bottles were too weak to bear the pressure of liquor while in a state of fermentation ; the consequence was that they burst, and the wine was spilt. Thus youthful converts when undue austerities are laid upon them, are likely to be discouraged at the outset, and thereby serious and lasting damage may be done to them.

III. THE GENERAL TRUTH SUGGESTED BY THE PRECEDING STATEMENTS.—“No man also having drunk old wine

straightway desireth new ; for he saith, the old is better." It is probable that a comparison is here drawn between the doctrines the Saviour taught and the discipline he exercised, and those of the Pharisees, and in a measure of John's also. New wine is sour and harsh, and such was the nature of much that they required ; but the instructions of our Lord, like old wine, were at once milder and stronger ; more agreeable to the taste, as well as more nutritious and invigorating to the spiritual system.

THE FINAL SEPARATION.

WHEN THE SON OF MAN SHALL COME IN HIS GLORY, AND ALL THE HOLY ANGELS WITH HIM, THEN SHALL HE SIT UPON THE THRONE OF HIS GLORY. AND BEFORE HIM SHALL BE GATHERED ALL NATIONS; AND HE SHALL SEPARATE THEM ONE FROM ANOTHER, AS A SHEPHERD DIVIDETH HIS SHEEP FROM THE GOATS. AND HE SHALL SET THE SHEEP ON HIS RIGHT HAND, BUT THE GOATS ON THE LEFT. THEN SHALL THE KING SAY UNTO THEM ON HIS RIGHT HAND, COME, YE BLESSED OF MY FATHER, &c. *Mat. xxv. 31-46.*

If any subject ever required to be approached with feelings of sacred awe, it is the one which has now to engage our attention. In comparison with it all other themes sink into utter insignificance. May a solemnizing influence pervade our minds, and may the divine Spirit direct our meditations. The first thing to be noticed is—

I. THE IMPORTANT PERIOD REFERRED TO.—“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory.” Let us inquire—

1. What this statement implies. It is the certainty of the Saviour's second coming. No arguments are adduced, no objections are answered; that he will appear is taken for granted, and underlies the whole of this sublime representation. There have been, it is true, in all ages as well as in these last days, impious scoffers whose language has been, “Where is the promise of his coming?” for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” Because the event has been so long delayed, they come to the conclusion that it will never take place. So many hundred years have rolled away, and yet there is no sign

of any change. The sun wears the same aspect, shines with the same brightness, diffuses the same warmth. The moon revolves in her usual course, and exhibits her wonted appearances. Seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, day and night, all follow each other in regular succession. But such reasoning is shallow in the extreme; for the uniformity of nature should have the effect, not of shaking our faith, but rather of establishing it. The sure word declares that the appointed seasons would continue, and year after year it is found to be so. The same word declares that the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, and its veracity may be as confidently relied upon in the one case as in the other.

While, however, the certainty of Christ's coming to judgment is assumed in the words before us, no intimation is given of the precise time of his appearing. "*When* the Son of man shall come;" it may be sooner than many imagine, or it may be far more distant than those who are longing for it are apt to conclude. It becomes us to be satisfied with the divine arrangements, and not seek to pry into those hidden mysteries which the All-wise has seen proper to reserve to himself. Premonitory indications may be given, as the Saviour shows in the former chapter; yet after enumerating many signs and wonders, the decisive assurance is added, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."

2. What this statement announces. If it does not tell us *when* the Son of man will come, it tells us *how* he will come. Without attempting therefore to be wise above what is written, let us proceed to examine the several clauses of which this striking representation is composed.

(1.) The manner of his appearing. It will be "in his glory." And how inconceivably great will that glory be! A faint glimpse of it was given to the disciples on the mount of transfiguration. Even then so radiant

were its beams, that his very raiment became white and glistening. Something of it was also seen by Paul when on his way to Damascus. The sun was shining in all the cloudless brilliancy of an Asiatic sky, but it was as nothing when compared with the brightness of him who arrested the persecutor in his mad career. And so with John in the isle of Patmos. Such was his overwhelming splendour on that occasion, that the beloved disciple, as soon as he saw him, fell at his feet as dead. But these were only mere shadows of the glory with which he will be invested on the great day. All previous displays will have no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory which excelleth. It will be the period of his public manifestation; and, arrayed in the robes of his imperial majesty, his people will gaze upon him with transporting admiration.

2. His numerous retinue. "And all the holy angels with him." What the number of those glorious principalities and powers may be we know not; but that they are a great multitude no one can doubt. To Peter the Saviour said, when in the depth of his humiliation, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" "The chariots of God," says the Psalmist, "are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." And Daniel, in words still more emphatic, declares, "Thousand thousands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him." But now the whole of those innumerable throngs, forsaking their sublime occupations, and descending from their lofty seats, will accompany Him who is their Prince, if not their Saviour. They will be there to add to the solemn pomp and splendour of the scene; they will be there to perform the part allotted to them on the occasion, "for he shall send his angels, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven;"

and they will be there to witness the proceedings of that eventful day, which will give them a clearer view than they ever had before, of the manifold wisdom, inflexible justice, and boundless mercy of God.

3. The dignified position he will assume. "Then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory." Oh, how imposing, and yet how marvellous will the sight be! He had been lying prostrate on the cold ground in almost insupportable agony; he had been suspended between two thieves on the cross; but now the suppliant of Gethsemane, and the reputed malefactor of Calvary, will be seated upon his glorious throne, in a posture of ineffable grace and inconceivable majesty.

II. THE SOLEMN TRANSACTIONS DESCRIBED.—Here we have to consider—

1. The persons who will appear before him. Some say that they will consist only of the church, or those who have made a profession of the Saviour's name. Others, Neander more particularly, strangely declares that they will be unbelievers alone, because all true disciples are freed from judgment, and shall never come into condemnation. But it is distinctly announced, "And before him shall be gathered all nations," words which should evidently be understood in their literal and most unlimited signification.

Were all the inhabitants of a single nation, especially if a great one, to be gathered before him, it would be an imposing sight. The inhabitants of China may be taken as an example. Simply to state, as we are in the habit of doing, that its population consists of about four hundred millions, conveys but an exceedingly vague impression to the mind. A more tangible notion is likely to be formed by the following representation. Let it be supposed that the people of that country were arrayed in marching order, five abreast, each row being a yard distant from the other. Standing thus, in rank and file, how far would they extend? The circumference of the

globe at the equator would only afford space for little more than half their number; so that after encircling the earth, there would remain of the vast army, a number almost sufficient to surround it over again. Let the order be given for them to march, and let them move on regularly at the rate of thirty miles a day. Were we present as spectators when the head of the column was set in motion, how long should we have to remain in order to see the close of the procession? Day after day, week after week, month after month, the marching continues without interruption; and upwards of four years must elapse before they have all passed by. Such an army, if placed singly, hand in hand, would reach from the earth to the moon; and it would reach the sun if they were placed aborhundred yards apart, or within call of each other.

Such is the population of one nation: but “before him shall be gathered *all* nations:” and not only so, but each generation of all nations. The whole of the various tribes and kindreds of which the human family has been composed from the creation of the world, and of whom it will be composed in all coming ages—the entire aggregate, without the absence of a single individual, will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

2. The division that will take place. “And he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.” At present the children of men are distributed into a great variety of classes; they are divided and sub-divided by innumerable social and artificial distinctions. But then the multifarious elements of human society will be resolved into two simple elements; and every line of demarcation will be obliterated, with the exception of that which is drawn between the righteous on the one hand, and the wicked on the other.

III. THE SEPARATE AWARDS PRONOUNCED.—Which of

the two classes will be first dealt with, this discourse clearly shows. We commence therefore with what is stated concerning—

1. The righteous. This part of the subject, it will be perceived, embraces four particulars.

(1.) The ineffable welcome they receive. “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Oh the rapturous bliss of those who will be thus addressed! What an ample, what an overwhelming compensation for all their labours and all their sufferings here below! Had we ten thousand lives, and had the whole been sacrificed for Christ, is it likely that we should begrudge the sacrifice in that day? Surely if the felicity of ages could be compressed into one moment, that will be the moment when he, in tones of indescribable love and grace, and with his adorable countenance beaming with infinite benignity, shall pronounce these wondrous words.

(2.) The special reasons adduced. “For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” We are justified by faith, but we shall be judged by works. By them the reality of faith is evinced, showing that it is not a mere pretence on the one hand, nor a mere formal and inoperative assent on the other. Faith without works is dead, just as works are dead without faith. The design of the day of judgment, we are to remember, is not to inform the great Searcher of hearts, but to manifest his righteousness to the world; it is to vindicate the ways of God to men. Therefore it will not be necessary to scrutinize the hidden principles of the soul, but simply to appeal to the fruits of those principles as they have appeared in the outward life. Hence the vast importance of our being careful to main-

tain good works. It is true that out of their proper place they are dangerous things, as when we make them the ground of our hope, and seek by their observance to establish our own righteousness. In that sense we cannot be too *jealous* of them ; but it is no reason why we should not be *zealous* for them in their right connexion.

The works which are here particularly referred to, are those of brotherly kindness and charity. There is something especially worthy of notice in the invariable prominence with which they are set forth in the scriptures. The apostle Peter, when exhorting us to add with all diligence one Christian attainment to another, places such acts as the climax of the whole. Paul, again, makes the decisive statement, “ And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” And in how conclusive a manner are the representations of these two eminent servants confirmed by the great Master on the occasion before us. As Isaac Taylor observes, “ Manifestly for the purpose of giving the highest possible force and solemnity to that sense of obligation which impels the Christian to abound in every good work, the ostensible proof of religious sincerity to be adduced in the momentous proceedings of the last day is made to consist in the fact of a life of beneficence.”

(3.) The questions which the favoured throng propose. “ Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ? ” This is the language of surprise as well as of humility, for at first they are unable to perceive how the eulogium which had been pronounced could apply to them. They knew that it had not been their privilege to sojourn with him in the days of his flesh ; and they might have often envied the happy lot of those who, like the family of

Bethany, had accommodated him under their roof, or those devoted females who ministered to him of their substance. Great indeed was the felicity of such as saw the days of the Son of man, and who possessed the ability and inclination to succour and relieve him. There are not many, we trust, who do not sympathise with the feeling evinced on one occasion by a little boy on reading the words, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." His eyes filled with tears, his tender breast heaved; and his mother, observing his emotion, inquired what was the matter. As well as his heavy sobs permitted he said, "I am sure, mamma, if I had been there, I would have given him my pillow." But while it is natural to admire and not improper to cherish such feelings, yet against what may be called the piety of mere sentimentalism we must strenuously guard; and hence the importance of viewing the language of the saved in connection with—

(4.) The explanation which is given in reply. "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." It is here shown that the Saviour has so closely identified himself with his people, that he places them between us and him, to be the recipients of our bounty; and by our conduct towards them he would have us to manifest our regard for him. In his own person he is now beyond the reach of our kindness, for the highest heavens have received him, where he hungers no more, and where all his privations and sufferings are for ever ended. But if we cannot offer him our softest couch, on which to recline his weary limbs, if we cannot invite him to sit at our hospitable board, if we cannot pour our costly ointment upon his head, if we cannot lay our offerings of gold and frankincense at his feet; yet there is something we can do—we can befriend his needy followers

whom he has left among us as his special representatives. And we are only deluding ourselves by thinking that if he were still on earth, we would gladly anticipate his every wish, and seek to soothe and alleviate all his sorrows, while we neglect those who are united to him by such close and tender ties.

2. The wicked. We have to hear—

(1.) Their awful doom. “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” These are inconceivably solemn words, perhaps the most solemn which the inspired volume contains. Much that is awful will take place on the great day, but compared with the passing of this dread sentence, all other horrors will sink into utter insignificance. It will not be the sun clothed with sackcloth, and the moon turned into blood; not the heavens departing like a scroll, and the elements melting with fervent heat; not the falling of the rocks, and the crash of the mountains; not the shrill tones of the archangel’s trump, with its echoes reverberating from pole to pole: none of these, although stupendously appalling, will after all have any terror when contrasted with that which this tremendous denunciation will produce.

(2.) The grounds on which it rests. “For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat,” &c. They are thus condemned not on account of any flagrant immorality; whatever they might have been in that respect, the only evils enumerated are those of a merely negative character. In many other parts of scripture the same principle is set forth. The fig-tree was cursed, not for bearing bad fruit, but for yielding none. The unprofitable servant was cast into outer darkness, not for wasting the talent committed to him, but for not employing it. And so here. All the stress is laid, not on what the wicked did, but on what they omitted doing. They might not have opposed the pious poor by whom they were sur-

rounded ; have defrauded them of no right, nor aggravated any of their sufferings. But while there was the absence of cruelty on the one hand, there was the absence of all kindness on the other ; and it is the latter alone that is referred to as the test of character, and set forth as the ground of condemnation.

IV. THE FINAL ISSUE DECLARED.—“ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment ; but the righteous into life eternal.” Such is the conclusion of the whole matter. The great assize is now over. The Judge has left his throne. The final destiny of both classes is irrevocably fixed ; and henceforth to the one there remains all the horrors of an eternal hell, and to the other the ineffable and unending bliss of heaven.

THE IMPORTANT APPEAL.

EXAMINE YOURSELVES, WHETHER YE BE IN THE FAITH; PROVE YOUR OWN SELVES. KNOW YE NOT YOUR OWN SELVES, HOW THAT JESUS CHRIST IS IN YOU, EXCEPT YE BE REPROBATES? —2 Cor. xiii. 5.

AFTER considering so many of the matchless discourses of our Lord, such an exhortation as that which is contained in these words of the apostle, cannot be out of place in addressing those who make a profession of the Saviour's name, now that we are approaching the close of our expositions. The same subject has already on various occasions been incidentally touched upon: but a fuller and more direct enforcement of it is, we believe, by no means unnecessary.

The church at Corinth appears to have been strong and prosperous. It was richly endowed with manifold gifts and graces, for which the apostle felt constrained to bless God, as we find at the commencement of the former epistle. He says, "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge: even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Such was the state of this Christian community, a state which gladdened the apostle's heart, and for which he expressed his fervent gratitude to Him from whom every good and perfect gift proceedeth.

At the same time, though he was enabled to address the Corinthians in the above language, certain abuses

had notwithstanding crept in among them. To those abuses he adverts in both of his epistles, and he has evident reference to them in the solemn charge of our text. As many among them had been guilty of glaring improprieties, and as they were all exposed to peculiar temptations, especially to the snares of certain false teachers, who endeavoured in every way to corrupt their minds from the simplicity that was in Christ; he therefore addresses to them the word of exhortation, an exhortation characterised by a spirit of great faithfulness and of deep seriousness. Since it concerns us as well as those to whom it was originally addressed, we shall notice—

I. THE NATURE OF THE DUTY WHICH IS HERE ENJOINED.—It is that of self-examination, a duty on which no ordinary stress is laid, and to which very marked prominence is given, in the inspired records. Again and again are we called upon to look within to the state of our own souls, that we might ascertain how matters stand there.

The calls of God in his word, we need not say, are many and various. Sometimes we are called upon to look backward; to look to the rock whence we were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence we were digged. Such a retrospect, if properly made, cannot fail to be productive of the most desirable results; it will fill us with humility on the one hand, and with gratitude on the other. At other times we are directed to look forward; and in proportion as we are under the influence of that faith which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, we shall undoubtedly do so; for it is the special province of that divine principle, not only to make hidden objects visible, but to bring distant objects near. Often, again, are we commanded to look upward. In consequence of our proneness to cleave to the dust, and to mind earthly things, the voice from heaven proclaims in our ears, “If ye then

be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." But the call in the words before us is to look inward; we are bidden to turn our attention for a while from the objects around us to the chambers of imagery within; we are to cultivate a closer acquaintance with ourselves by self-converse, self-communion, and self-inspection.

In enforcing this important matter, the apostle makes use of two expressions. The first is, "Examine yourselves;" let diligent, honest, impartial search be made as to your state and character in the sight of God. But he also adds, "prove your own selves," in allusion probably to the method by which metals are tried. As if he had said, Let your motives, principles, tempers, language, lives, be thoroughly tested, in order to ascertain what manner of persons you really are.

The standard by which we are to prove ourselves is the word of God. Many are the important uses to which the sacred scriptures should be applied, and this is one of the chief. An old minister, on a certain occasion, in the application of his sermon, observed, that he would improve the subject in four separate ways. First, as a whet-stone: secondly, as a load-stone; thirdly, as a mile-stone: and fourthly, as a touch-stone. Now what he thus quaintly said of the special truth on which he had been discoursing, is applicable to divine truth at large. It is a whet-stone, sharpening and quickening our dulness and deadness, giving a keener edge to our desires, to our prayers and praises, and all the spiritual exercises we have to perform. It is a load-stone, drawing us from our distance nearer and nearer to God, attracting us from the objects of time and sense, to heaven and heavenly things. It is a mile-stone, not merely pointing out the way of life, but showing us what progress we have made in our journey, and what distance we have yet to travel, before we reach the city

of the great King. It is also a touch-stone, making known what we are, whether we are coin of celestial currency, or whether it may be said of us, "Reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them."

But while the apostle sets forth the duty he enjoins by a two-fold expression, he likewise presents the special object to which that duty should be applied under a two-fold aspect. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith," is the first part of his exhortation. The faith of the gospel is evidently intended; and it is on our believing the testimony of God as given in his word, that our present acceptance and our final salvation depend. If, therefore, we wish to know whether we are in a state of grace now, and whether we shall be admitted into the kingdom of glory hereafter, let us give earnest heed to this important matter.

The other view is, "Prove your own selves; know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is *in you*, except ye be reprobates." The phrase which is here employed, that of Christ being in us, and its counterpart of our being in Christ, are very frequently met with in the New Testament. The expressions are peculiar, and it is to be feared that many have not clear ideas as to their signification. It would appear that three things are more especially involved in them.

1. Union with Christ. "As *in* Adam all die, even so *in* Christ shall all be made alive." The connexion which subsists between the whole human family and the first man, our great ancestral head, is similar to that which subsists between the Lord Jesus and all true believers. In virtue of the former connexion the curse and condemnation which he incurred become the sad inheritance of his posterity, while in virtue of the latter, all the benefits which the Redeemer procured by his obedience unto death are enjoyed by those who believe in his name. "As by one man's disobedience many

were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." There is an obvious parallelism between the work of both, and the connexion between both and their respective seeds, is shown in the clearest manner.

2. The possession of the love of Christ. "I have you in my heart," says the apostle when addressing the Philippians; an expression which indicates that they were objects of his special regard and affection. In like manner, for Christ to be in us denotes that we love him with pure hearts fervently.

3. Being influenced by the spirit and temper of Christ. "If Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness." To have the mind of Christ is evidently identical with the indwelling of Christ. A personal indwelling of him in the soul there is not, and cannot be, any more than there is a personal indwelling of Satan in unconverted sinners. When it is said that the devil entered into Judas, and when he filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Ghost, we are not for a moment to suppose that the person of the fallen archangel went into them. In the case of demoniacal possession that appears to have been done, but neither of these men were demoniacs. What is intended is evidently that the Evil One succeeded in filling their minds with those thoughts and feelings which led to such fearful results. Just so with the indwelling of Christ; it is to have those holy principles implanted in us, which will influence and control our whole course and conduct. Hence the language of the apostle John, "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." For God to dwell in the heart, and for his love to be shed abroad in the heart, are identical expressions; and so it is further added, "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his spirit."

Now these are the special objects in reference to which we are to examine and prove ourselves. It is whether we be in the faith, and whether Jesus Christ is in us, except we be reprobates. That there is such a thing as possessing the assurance that we are his, is undoubted. How did the early Christians express themselves concerning this matter? They could say, "We know that we are of God;" "we know that we have passed from death unto life;" "we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, *and we are in him that is true*, even in his Son Jesus Christ." Such was their language; and it was their being able to use such language, that filled them with joy and peace in believing.

"The Spirit itself," says Paul, "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." These words are explained in different ways, but we believe the following to be their true signification. The Holy Spirit speaks in the scriptures and he also operates in the believer's heart. Now his testimony in the word, and his work in the soul, agree with each other; and the evidence of our spiritual state lies in that agreement. We take the scriptures as dictated by him, and we there find what he testifies concerning the character of God's people. Now if our spirit, in the court of conscience, and before the great Father of spirits, bears witness to a correspondence between the description which is there given, and what we find in ourselves, there is thus a concurrence of the two testimonies. The one answers to the other, and in proportion to the measure in which they do so, are we furnished with the evidences of our adoption.

It is only, we believe, in this way that we can intelligently comply with the exhortation of our text. We are to look into the Bible on the one hand, and to our own hearts and lives on the other. Any other examina-

tion will be altogether unavailing. But we shall now proceed to consider—

II. THE NECESSITY OF THIS DUTY.—It arises from the solemn fact of our liability to deceive ourselves in this truly momentous matter. That we are exposed to such danger appears from several considerations.

1. The frequent warnings which are addressed to us. We find the apostles in their several epistles again and again harping upon this string. “Let no man deceive himself.” “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” “If any man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.” “Be not deceived: God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” Now whence the need of such repeated warnings unless we are in danger of being deceived as to our true character and condition?

2. The great lengths to which many have gone who, after all, were strangers to the root of the matter. There is something truly solemn in the words which were addressed to one of the seven churches: “I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” By the “name” spoken of, it is not a mere profession that is intended. Even were it thus understood the statement would be appalling; but the idea conveyed is evidently that of fame or reputation. They were highly thought of, admired, applauded; and yet notwithstanding the pre-eminent estimation in which they were held, there was no life in them. Take, again, the class referred to in the sixth chapter of Hebrews: a class which there is reason to conclude had never known the grace of God in truth. Though they were enlightened, and had tasted of the heavenly gift, were made

partakers of the Holy Ghost, received the good word of God, and felt the powers of the world to come; they were, all the while, destitute of that vital, sanctifying, abiding piety, which alone is of any real avail to its possessors.

3. The feelings of holy jealousy with which the most eminent servants of Christ have regarded themselves. Of such not one was more distinguished than the great apostle of the Gentiles; yet how does he speak of himself? "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." Oh what language to be used by such an individual! Let us think of his holy life, the matchless labours in which he was engaged, the bitter persecutions to which he was exposed, and, above all, the peculiar favours by which he was distinguished. He had been caught up into the third heaven; had gazed upon the glories of the celestial spheres; had mingled with the spirits of the perfected just, listened to their accents, and joined, it may be, in their anthems of praise. Yet this is he who gave utterance to the above words. If, then, such a one, the chiefest of the apostles, the most exalted of all the saints, if he found it necessary to exercise such caution, and to cherish, occasionally at least, such fears, how much more necessary must it be for us to do so, who are at best so immeasurably far behind him.

A friend visited the late Thomas Scott, the celebrated commentator, in his last illness. He found him in a gloomy frame of mind, which induced him to ask, why he did not appear more cheerful, under the influence of a good hope through grace? "If you have by faith taken hold of the Redeemer's righteousness, will not all be well?" "Ah," replied Mr. Scott, "it is that *if* that alone distresses me; for I fear lest I should be indulging in a false hope, and that a treacherous heart should after all deceive me." Thus he knew, excellent man though

he was, not merely that without were fightings, but also that within were fears.

The little word above quoted is a very important one, and it becomes us often to think of it. Upon it how much depends ! *If* we have taken hold of the Redeemer and his justifying righteousness, all will indeed be well, well in time and well throughout eternity. Among the various connections in which this monosyllable is found, not one is more momentous or more glorious, than when the apostle says - "*if* children." Then all the rich blessings, commencing with no condemnation and ending with no separation, which are set forth in the eighth chapter of Romans, where the expression is found, are ours. If children, all things shall work together for our good, the bitter and the sweet, the storms and the sunshine. If children, we can take up those triumphant strains with which the chapter concludes : and though earth should threaten, and hell oppose, exclaim, " Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth ? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." In a word, " If children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ : if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Oh what blessed issues, what inconceivably glorious results ! On the other hand, *if not* all will be in vain ; our hopes, attainments, possessions, will prove abortive, and cover us with shame and confusion.

In drawing to a close we would remark, that we ought, above all things, to dread the thought of being self-deceivers. Nothing surely can be more awful than to be deceived in a matter of such infinite moment. To take it for granted that we are justified before God, and yet to be enemies to him by wicked works ! To imagine that we are regenerated by his Holy Spirit, and yet to

be still in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity ! To suppose that we are travelling along the road that leads to heaven, and yet, day after day, to be approaching nearer to hell !

Let us be satisfied with nothing short of a saving interest in the Lord Jesus. To win Christ and be found in him, not having our own righteousness, is pre-eminently the one thing needful. United to him by a living faith, we shall not, to use the term employed in the text, be "reprobates;" we shall not be rejected or disapproved, for such is the meaning of the expression. We shall, on the contrary, be accepted in the Beloved, to the praise of the glory of his grace.

We have only to add that all our self-examinations should be combined with frequent and fervent prayer. After searching ourselves let us invoke the divine scrutiny. Our hearts are at best deceitful, and those who trust in them are stigmatised by the wise man as fools. To draw nigh, in a spirit of self-distrust, to him who tries the reins of the children of men, will also be an encouraging indication of sincerity. A faithless servant is not accustomed to invite the scrutiny of his master. A person who has stolen property in his possession is not likely to welcome the investigation of the officers of justice. If we, then, would have truth in the inward parts ; if we would be wise virgins, and not foolish ones ; if we would be real believers, and not mere nominal professors ; let us, after having examined ourselves, call in the aid of him, who cannot err on the one hand, nor be deceived on the other. "Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts : and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

THE DIVINE EXPECTATION.

IT MAY BE THEY WILL CONSIDER.—Ezekiel XII. 3.

IN noticing the expectation which is here expressed, we shall glance, in the first place, at the subject to which it refers; and then we shall specify some of the means employed in order to its accomplishment.

I. THE SUBJECT TO WHICH THIS EXPECTATION REFERS. It is that of consideration, a subject, as all must acknowledge, of no mean importance. To occupy much time in explaining its nature is, however, unnecessary, for it is well known what the word signifies. To consider is to think, to ponder, to deliberate; it is to have the mind calmly and intently fixed on any subject which may be set before it.

There is an obvious distinction to be observed between knowing and considering. It is quite possible, and indeed quite common, to possess the one without possessing the other. To have knowledge is one thing; to have serious consideration is altogether another thing. Much is there that men know, that they never rightly ponder, or lay to heart. Many are, alas! grossly ignorant of the things that belong to their peace; but while the sin of ignorance greatly abounds, that of thoughtlessness is far more general.

It is the absence of this frame of mind that is set forth in the words before us. "It may be they will consider;" it is possible that they may be brought to attend to their spiritual interests, but at present it is otherwise; they go on heedless and reckless, caring for none of those things which most of all concern them. And what is here implied, is in many passages expressly declared. How solemn and emphatic, for example, are the

words with which Isaiah commences his important predictions: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Such is God's charge; and how affecting, yea, how humiliating a charge is it! We often speak, in high and glowing strains, of the greatness and dignity of man; and in many respects he is truly great and dignified. In physical structure, how curiously, how wondrously, how fearfully is he made! And then what is he in body, to what he is in soul! Its nature, its faculties, its mighty capabilities, what tongue can tell! But while he is thus exalted physically and mentally, what is he morally and spiritually! He who was made but a little lower than the angels is sunk, not merely on a level with, but beneath the very brutes. He is become more brutish even than they. Well might Pascal say "that man is at once both the glory and the scandal of the universe;" by natural endowments its glory—by moral delinquency its scandal and disgrace. And according to the prophet's representation, the main element of that delinquency, or rather the undeniable demonstration of it, is his heedlessness and unconcern.

But it will be necessary for us to specify a few separate particulars in reference to which this feature more prominently appears. And we commence by observing—

1. That men do not consider that they are sinful creatures. The solemn fact that man is a sinner is proclaimed by innumerable voices. It is proclaimed in the open volume of nature, and the mysterious volume of providence, as well as in the volume of divine inspiration. It is proclaimed by all the clamours of conscience from within, and by all the distresses of life from without. It is proclaimed by every sigh that rises from the

bosom, and by every tear that falls from the eye. It is proclaimed by the pangs with which we enter the world, and by all the agonies with which we quit it. It is proclaimed by the dismal groans of hell, and by the transporting songs of heaven. It is proclaimed especially by the whole work of redemption from first to last. There would have been no need of Christ as a Saviour if man were not a sinner. He would not have appeared as our Mediator if there was no offence, nor as our Surety if there was no debt to be discharged.

But while the fact is undoubted, how few are there by whom it is considered, and seriously laid to heart. Let us hear the language of him, who looketh down from his high and holy habitation, and beholdeth all the children of men: "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle." Man has sinned against God times without number; sinned against him with a high hand, and with an outstretched arm: his sacred laws he has broken, his dread authority he has despised; and yet, after all, so unconcerned is he that he never thinks of asking, "What have I done?" If thou hast, O man, sinned against him with whom is terrible majesty; whose displeasure is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness; who declares that "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish shall be upon every soul of man that doeth evil;" if thou hast sinned against him, and if in sinning against him such tremendous consequences are involved, is it not high time for thee to inquire, "What have I done?" Oh let the question be seriously pondered, and seek to realize the true import of that humbling confession—a confession which a right knowledge of thy state and character will constrain thee to adopt as thine own—"I have sinned; and what shall I say unto thee, O thou preserver of men?"

2. Men do not consider that they are dying creatures. The great mass of mankind feel as easy and secure as if death were literally done away, as if his triumphs had come to a perpetual end, and that, wearied with his work of slaughter, he was brought at length to say, It is enough. But such, thoughtless man, is not the case. The great destroyer is still at work, at work continually, never resting from his labours, never allowing the grave to be closed, never permitting the hatching of the world to be taken down. According to the usual reckoning, a whole generation passes away in thirty-three years; and if we take the population of the globe to be one thousand millions, there will be no difficulty in ascertaining the dying statistics of our race. By carrying out the calculation we shall find that thirty millions die every year; that eighty-six thousand die every day; that three thousand six hundred die every hour; that sixty die every minute; and that one dies every second. It is, verily, a dying world in which we live, the conquests of the great enemy being thus incessant and continuous.

Near the commencement of the book of Genesis a special chapter is occupied with the records of the early inhabitants of the world. Very protracted were the lives of those ancient patriarchs, yet they were a mortal race after all, for it is said concerning each in succession, "And he died." They were doubtless men of note in their several generations; but whatever the sphere in which they moved, or the stirring scenes through which they passed, all that is said of them is, that they lived so many years, begat sons and daughters, and then died. Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years, and he died. Seth lived nine hundred and twelve years, and he died. Canaan lived nine hundred and ten years, and he died. And at length Methuselah, after living nine hundred and sixty-nine years, almost a millenium, like the rest he also died. The biography of each is closed with the same words, brief, pregnant, affecting—"And he died."

Now as it was with them, so will it most assuredly be with us. Widely different indeed will our lives be from theirs as regards their length, but they will be alike in their termination. Many things *may* be said of us, but there is no *may* be about its being said, "And he died." Nor is the solemn event far distant. The last sickness will soon come; the drawing of the parting breath will soon come; the dreary coffin in which we shall be confined will soon come; the hour when the company will assemble to perform the last office of friendship and attend us to our long home, will soon come; the time when the earth will be thrown upon us in the narrow house in which we shall be laid, will soon come: all this will soon arrive, and the places which know us now will know us no more for ever.

There are none present, we are persuaded, who would feel any hesitation in saying, It is all true. We must die, and we may soon die. But while you are ready to make such an acknowledgment, we fear that by many of you the subject is but little thought of after all. Reminded of your mortality you are continually, but notwithstanding the innumerable warnings and admonitions of divine providence, the exclamation is as seasonable as ever: "O that they were wise, that they understood this, *that they would consider their latter end.*"

3. Men do not consider that they are immortal creatures. They are assured in the word of truth that however death may change the mode of their existence, it will never come to a termination—that it will endure when rolling years shall cease to move; and yet they do not consider this. Let countless ages pass away; ages numerous as the sands upon the shore, numerous as the atoms in the air, numerous as the blades of grass, numerous as the forest leaves, numerous as the drops of morning dew; let all these pass away, and they will still possess a conscious existence, in which they will be

exulting in ineffable blessedness or writhing in unutterable woe. Oh what infatuation must they be guilty of, who give to the empty toys and trifles of a fleeting day all their thoughts, and reserve none for the solemn and momentous realities which concern their everlasting well-being !

II. THE MEANS EMPLOYED FOR BRINGING ABOUT THE EXPECTATION WHICH IS HERE EXPRESSED.—Of such we can only advert to one or two of the most prominent ; and we commence with—

1. The divine forbearance. When we think of the insults which God has received, and is continually receiving from the children of men, his forbearance appears truly amazing. His name they blaspheme, his authority they despise, his mercies they abuse, his sabbaths they profane, his gospel, with all its rich and glorious blessings, they set at nought ; and yet he bears with them week after week, month after month, and year after year continually. Did he not possess riches of goodness and long-suffering, it is certain that the despite he has received from our world would have exhausted them long ago. “ I believe,” as one observes, “ that if the most patient of all the angels in heaven had the government of the world committed to him for four and twenty hours, he would burn it to ashes before the day was over.” Another gave expression to a similar sentiment when he said, “ If I had the arm of God without the heart of God, I should soon be tempted to hurl the thunderbolts of vengeance upon so vile, so provoking, so rebellious a race.” But let us bless God that it is not man nor angel with whom we have to do ; and let us rejoice in the thought that, however great his power may be, his compassion is no less signal, and that the strength of his arm, however mighty, does not transcend the boundless love of his heart.

Now why is it that God is so wonderful in his for-

bearance? This question the apostle answers: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." His language is, I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger upon them: I will not turn to destroy them, and pour the vials of my vengeance upon their guilty heads. Judgment is my strange work; I will bear with them yet longer, in order to see what effect that will have upon them. Who can tell? it may be they will consider. And if they do, all will be well; if they are only brought to think of their ways, the consequence will be that they will turn their feet unto my testimonies.

Men and brethren, for a long time he has borne with you. Had he been man and not God, you would have been given up before now, and been made as Admah, and set as Zeboim of old. Had he cut you down in your sins twenty years ago, without a moment's warning, he would only have done what your transgressions loudly called upon him to do. But not thus did he deal with you: he spared you another year, and yet another, and still another. And when he found that such a mode of treatment was altogether lost upon you; that you took occasion, in consequence, to wax bolder in your sinful courses: that because sentence against your wicked works was not executed speedily, your hearts were set with fuller determination to do evil; and when, in his righteous displeasure, he was about to swear that he would bear with you no longer; when he was just going to whet his glittering sword, and his hand to lay hold on judgment: there was One who then mercifully interposed, even the great Intercessor, the Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous—he stepped forward as the deadly blow was about to be given, and cried, Spare them yet another year also. Well, him the

Father heareth always, and him he heard for you. Spared you were, and here you are still, we fear, thoughtless, impenitent, and unbelieving.

But God's long-suffering will not last for ever. Long did he bear with the inhabitants of the old world, and he bore with them on the principle that perhaps they would consider; but heeding not, vengeance at length overtook them. Therefore take warning; despise not his forbearance any longer; but "to-day, after so long a time, as it is said, To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

2. The afflictive dispensations of divine providence. God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. He chastens us for our profit; and one of the first and most important effects produced by his chastening, when it is sanctified, is serious consideration. For a man to be confined in the solitude of a sick chamber week after week, how likely is it to bring him to pause and ponder; to commune with his own heart upon his bed, and be still; to look within him, and to look behind him, and to look before him, and to look above him. Not a few will bless God through all eternity that they have been afflicted; for before they were afflicted they went astray, heedless and reckless, but then they were brought to keep his word.

With the prodigal son it was so. That was a blessed day for him when he was brought to consider. In the time of his prosperity all reflection was banished; but when he came to himself he began to think, and all his thoughts were directed towards that happy home which he had left, and that loving father whom he had so grievously offended. There, he knew full well, plenty still reigned; and, contrasting his own miserable condition with the favoured lot of the meanest domestics that belonged to the establishment of which he was once so prominent a member, he could not refrain from regarding even them with feelings of envy. "How many

hired servants of my father's," was his language, "have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger." So he resolves, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." Such was the result of his troubles and privations—they led him to consider; and through his being thus brought to consider, he was restored to his father's house, and enjoyed once more his father's favour.

Now such a view of the subject would almost tempt us to present this prayer on behalf of our thoughtless fellow-creatures: Bring them into trouble, blast their expectations, wither their gourds: then it may be they will consider. Lay on them thine afflicting hand, and cast them upon beds of pain and languishing: then it may be they will consider. Surround them with thy judgments; let plagues and pestilences be commissioned to go forth; let famine stalk abroad through the land; let commercial distresses and embarrassments abound; let frightful accidents and disasters be permitted to take place: then—it may be—who can tell? it may be they will consider. In their affliction, whether personal, or domestic, or national, they may seek thee, and that early.

But while there are instances which encourage us to say, "It may be they will consider;" on the other hand, innumerable cases constrain us to add,—that it may be they won't. How many are there on whom afflictions have no salutary effect, and produce no real or permanent impression. After all their sick-bed vows, all their apparently penitential cries and confessions, it has happened to them on their restoration to health, according to the true proverb, "The dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Nor is it once or twice that this has been done. Visitation has been added to visitation, and the mournful consequences being still the same, God has at length

been led to say, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." Discipline, reproof, correction, are thrown away upon you, for instead of becoming better you grow worse and worse. I will not, then, again strike. What purpose would it serve if I did, having already so often stricken in vain. Let them alone; the rod shall be laid aside, and that because ere long the *sword* will have to be employed.

God has, doubtless, in some way or other, visited each of us with his afflictive dispensations. As he was laying the stroke upon us, his language was, "It may be they will consider." For a while the visitation was continued, but at length it was removed; and it becomes us seriously to inquire why it was removed? Was it because the end for which it was mercifully sent was answered, by our being brought to turn with full purpose of heart to him that smote us; or was it because it was seen that its further continuance would be altogether in vain? Surely this is a matter that deserves to be deeply pondered by us all.

3. The ministry of the gospel. That there is in it a special adaptation to bring men to consider, is sufficiently obvious; for what truths, how important, how solemn, how arousing, has the ambassador of the cross to proclaim! They embrace all that is great and glorious, all that is alluring and terrifying, all that is awful in vengeance, and all that is moving and melting in redeeming love and mercy. And by way of enforcing his appeals he draws considerations from every quarter; from God and from men, from life and from death, from time and from eternity, from heaven and from hell; all are laid under contribution, and brought to bear upon the hearts and consciences of his hearers. When a minister possesses the true spirit of his work, and enters upon it with his whole soul; when he keeps back nothing that is profitable, but, regardless of man's frown and of man's favour, declares the whole counsel

of God ; when he speaks as a dying man to dying men, and remembers that the only sermon he will soon be permitted to preach will be the epitaph upon his tombstone ; when such a spirit is infused into the gospel ministry, it possesses, as all must perceive, a striking adaptation to awaken men from their lethargy, and bring them to ponder the things which belong to their peace.

But how often does it happen that persons continue in a state of utter carelessness, even when favoured year after year with the most arousing and faithful ministrations ! “ It may be,” says the preacher, half hoping, half despairing—“ it may be they will consider.” Let me plead, let me exhort, let me remonstrate ; let me set the great salvation in the fulness and freeness of its blessings before them ; let me hold up a bleeding Saviour to their view, and let them hear him saying, “ Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by ; behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow ?” or let me take them to the brink of the burning pit, to witness its horrors and to hear its groans, or ascend with them the delectable mountains, and give them a glimpse of the shining city, with its walls of crystal, and its gates of gold, and its crowns of amaranth, and its trees of life, and its rivers of pleasure, and its ravishing melodies and immortal joys ; let me do this, and surely they will consider. But, alas ! how does the history of so many bygone sabbaths falsify such pleasing expectations ! Many of our hearers are impregnable to every attack. No representation appears to touch them. Reason with them—they will not be convinced ; set motives before them—they will not be persuaded ; address their hearts—they will not be affected ; appeal to their consciences—they will not feel guilty ; try to excite their fears—they will not be alarmed ; seek to allure them—and they will not be allured. Beseech them, weep over them, expostulate with them, set good and evil, life and death before

them; yet with many all, alas! is in vain. They will not listen to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. With the rebellious Jews of old, their language virtually and practically is, "As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee."

Shall we then give it all up in despair? No, not so either. That we will not, dare not do, as long as the promise is unrepealed, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." Oh, for the accomplishment of this gracious word, in which is all our hope! Here is the valley full of dry bones: what can be done with them? Well, prophesy to them, and say, "O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." But they will not hear. Our prophesying is in vain. After all our earnest and repeated cries, no motion appears; the insensibility of death still continues unbroken. Is there anything more we can do? Yes, one resource yet remains. As the last but unfailing alternative, we look upward and cry, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."—"So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

THE END.

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